

IF THIS CALL COULD TALK:

BENNY GOODMAN'S CLARINET

RECORDING OF "CHINA BOY" PERFORMED BY BENNY GOODMAN.

Rachel Edelson: There's so much lore around that concert, as indeed there ought to be.

Jon Hancock: It was busy outside of Carnegie Hall.

Rachel Edelson: There's wonderful pictures of the lines of people waiting to get in.

Rob Hudson: It's one of the most famous jazz concerts ever.

Rachel Edelson: Everybody expected something wonderful.

Jon Hancock: There were celebrities there and and Benny Goodman fans

Rachel Edelson: For my father and the band, this was, the word godsend I guess comes into my mind.

Jessica Vosk: *Welcome to If This Hall Could Talk, a podcast from Carnegie Hall. I am your host, Jessica Vosk and in this series we'll look at the legendary and sometimes quirky history of the Hall. From momentous occasions to the eclectic array of world-renowned artists that have taken to the Hall's stages, in each episode, we'll explore unique items from our archives collection, listen together to some of the amazing music made on the stage and travel back in time to relive incredible moments that have shaped the culture we live in today.*

For this episode, we shine a light on Benny Goodman's clarinet--the instrument that was single-handedly responsible for the creation of Carnegie Hall's Rose Museum. To understand its significance to the hall and music history, let's rewind over 80 years ago to a now legendary concert that almost didn't happen.

Benny Goodman was a superstar, the King of Swing. Not exactly a style of music you would imagine in a concert hall with tidy rows of crimson seats, like Carnegie. Today, we live in a culture that prizes "innovation," but looking back, it can sometimes be difficult to appreciate the risks and uncertainty of doing something new for the very first time, especially when the outcome is a resounding success.

Top of the pile, Benny Goodman's stature allowed him to break rules others couldn't. He could also hire the best people in the business -

Jon Hancock: He could afford the best PR men, the best advertising men, the best promoters..

Jessica Vosk: *and the best impresario. Someone who was not afraid to shake things up, try something new — someone like Sol Hurok.*

RECORDING OF “ONE O’CLOCK JUMP” PERFORMED BY BENNY GOODMAN.

Jessica Vosk: *This is Jon Hancock an author and historian who grew up listening to Benny Goodman and eventually wrote a book about Benny Goodman’s now-famous Carnegie Hall concert..*

Jon Hancock: It so happens that the impresario Sol Hurok was just starting a new series of concerts at Carnegie Hall.

Jessica Vosk: *For this series of concerts, Sol sought out musicians who were making waves in music, in culture, and Benny Goodman certainly fit that bill.*

Jon Hancock: So Sol Hurok went down to the Manhattan room in the Hotel Pennsylvania to see what all this fuss was about. And he was delighted to see that a lot of the kids weren't dancing, they were crowded around the stage just enjoying the music. The publicity guys got together and said, "Why don't we put Benny on at Carnegie Hall?"

Gino Francesconi: But Benny was so concerned that it was going to flop that he didn't even bother buying tickets for his family. Gino Francesconi, Carnegie Hall's founding archivist. There was a story that he actually had contacted the comedian Beatrice Lillie to wait in the wings if in case things got rough. In case things got rough and it was a disaster, she'd go out and calm the house down.

RECORDING OF “THERE ARE FAIRIES AT THE BOTTOM OF OUR GARDEN”
PERFORMED BY BENNY GOODMAN.

Jessica Vosk: *Rachel Edelson, Benny Goodman’s daughter.*

Rachel Edelson: He just thought, "What if we bomb?"

Rob Hudson: And it's just fascinating because they had seats on the stage so that the band was surrounded. And of course, the stories about Benny being very nervous...

Jessica Vosk: *Archivist Rob Hudson.*

Rob Hudson: The perception was, I don't know... Like, "Are people going to sit still and listen to this?"

RECORDING OF “DON’T BE THAT WAY” PERFORMED BY BENNY GOODMAN.

Jessica Vosk: *Of course, when people went to a Benny Goodman show, they expected to dance, but it turned out Benny had nothing to worry about.*

Jon Hancock: It was a freezing cold day actually in New York. The Hudson River had frozen over. So I think they turned away seven and a half thousand people in the last few days. And a police cordon stopping people from getting in. Inside it was kind of like a sort of Mardi Gras kind of thing. It was a really frantic sort of electric atmosphere in there.

Gino Francesconi: And they all went out and there was this applause and it wasn't until Gene Krupa took off on the drums that the place went wild.

Jessica Vosk: *The concert was a groundbreaking success and made it official: Benny Goodman would go down in history as one of the greats. Remarkably, Goodman didn't even know the concert was being recorded, and yet the album went on to become one of the most iconic jazz albums of all time.*

Jon Hancock's brother introduced the album to him when he was 6 years old.

Jon Hancock: I just love the drums, those drums. And he told me about a jam session. "Well, what's a jam session?" "Oh, they're just making it up as they go along." And I couldn't believe it, I mean, how can you make that up?"

RECORDING OF "AVALON" PERFORMED BY BENNY GOODMAN.

Jessica Vosk: *Jon Hancock listened to that record so many times it started to feel as if he had been right there, at Carnegie Hall, to witness Benny Goodman's every breath and sigh.*

The album was incredibly influential to a lot of musicians. Cuban instrumentalist and performer, Paquito D'Rivera, who has been on stage at Carnegie Hall many times, recalls when he first heard it:

Paquito D'Rivera: My father came home one day with a recording of Benny Goodman live at Carnegie Hall. And when my father... I said, "What is that?" That was very shocking for me. That music was, make a big impression of me. And then I asked my father, "What is that?" He said, "Well, that is swing." He never used the word jazz for some reason. He say swing. He liked that word. "That is swing. That is Benny Goodman, and that is a recording that they did live at Carnegie Hall." And then I fall in love with that music. It was a great impression for me, a great influence. Benny was one of my first influences, still today it is. That recording inspired me to be a clarinet player.

Jessica Vosk: *And it's not only the music on the album, it's the feel of the concert itself, the energy of the band, and the interaction with the audience. In fact, when the band*

recreated the concert a few months later, at a venue in Boston, it didn't have the same effect. Rachel Edelson, Benny Goodman's daughter.

Rachel Edelson: I imagine some people are unaware of how differently musicians play when there's an audience. I played enough classical music to know, there's a level of adrenaline that just makes you play better. You're more into it because you're terrified.

RECORDING OF "DOWN SOUTH CAMP MEETING" PERFORMED BY BENNY GOODMAN.

Gino Francesconi: It was extraordinary in many, many ways, because number one, it was swing and nobody sat to listen to swing.

Jessica Vosk: *Gino Francesconi is the founder of the Rose Archives.*

Gino Francesconi: You danced to it. You went to a ballroom and you went to dance and the music kept you going. This was the first time people bought a ticket to actually sit down and listen to it as an art form. That's number one.

Jessica Vosk: *Again, Paquito d'Rivera:*

Paquito D'Rivera: "There is only two kind of music, good music and the other stuff." And Benny was a classical trained musician who liked to play swing jazz. So the combination is perfect. He developed that very classy sound. I love the sound of Benny. He was very special.

Jessica Vosk: *Secondly...*

Rob Hudson: Benny had an integrated ensemble, which was very rare.

Paquito D'Rivera: A jazz orchestra without Black people, it like a Cuban music orchestra without the Cubans or something.

Jon Hancock: When you think of those horrendous stories about Black musicians not being able to go in the front door of the venues that they were playing in, it's just unthinkable really.

Jessica Vosk: *Again, Rob.*

Rob Hudson: And especially to bring it to a major stage like this in a prominent place like that. And then of course, all the other guests that they had from Duke Ellington's band and Count Basie's band.

Jessica Vosk: *Everyone agrees, the concert was historic. So where was the historical record? Founder of the Rose Archives, Gino Francesconi could hardly find any paper evidence the concert happened at all.*

Gino Francesconi: My crew and I did as much research as we could. And over the years we collected thousands and thousands of programs. And yet, the January 16th, 1938 concert, the programs are exceedingly rare. We have one and a photocopy of it. And in the 30 years that I've been searching for programs, I've never seen another, not on eBay, not with jazz collectors. And then one day I'm reading in Downbeat Magazine that the audience was making paper airplanes out of the programs at that 1938 concert and throwing them all over the house.

And I thought, "Now I know why there aren't any programs because the audience tore most of them up."

Jessica Vosk: *The mystery of the missing programs was one thing. Much worse was what else went missing: the recording of the concert. How on earth did THAT happen? Well, the story begins in 1950, when Benny Goodman sold his Park Avenue apartment to his sister in law, her name was Rachel.*

Gino Francesconi: And she calls him up and says, "There are 28 boxes in the linen closet upstairs on the second floor." Benny being Ben. He said, "Throw them away." And she called him again and said, "I think you should take a look at these. They say Carnegie Hall on them." And he couldn't be bothered.

Jessica Vosk: *Thankfully, his sister in law ignored Benny and decided to send him the recordings.*

Gino Francesconi: ...he realized the 1938 concert had been recorded and he forgot about that.

Jessica Vosk: *Benny took the recordings to Columbia Records and they realized they were going to have a hit.*

Gino Francesconi: It was put into production. It's never been out of print. It's the longest selling jazz recording of all time.

Jessica Vosk: *You're listening to If This Hall Could Talk. I'm Jessica Vosk. We'll return to the show in just a moment. Stay with us.*

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Welcome back. You're listening to If This Hall Could Talk, a show about the history of Carnegie Hall. Today, we're examining the item that was the reason the archives at the Rose Museum were created: Benny Goodman's clarinet.

RECORDING OF "BUGLE CALL RAG" PERFORMED BY BENNY GOODMAN.

Jon Hancock: So we signed the contract in the summer of 1950 with Columbia Records to make classical recordings. and jazz recordings. And he handed over the tapes for the Carnegie Hall and the record came out in December of 1950. They took a chance with it. You know, they didn't, jazz or swing music anyway had moved on. You know, nobody was playing swing anymore. Nobody was listening to swing. Bebop had come and gone and to a certain extent it created a boom in swing music again.

Every time I play it, I hear something new. It's super. It's a super record. that will last forever.

Jessica Vosk: *But if it wasn't for Benny Goodman's sister-in-law, this extraordinary thing that seemed predestined to last forever wouldn't have been discovered.*

Gino Francesconi: The extraordinary thing to me is that our museum was basically established because of the donation of Benny's clarinet. It was jazz that actually got our museum going.

Jessica Vosk: *It's true. An instrument used for jazz is why Carnegie Hall now has as museum. All because of Benny Goodman's daughter, Rachel Edelson. She was willing to give Carnegie her father's most cherished possession, but only under one condition:*

Rob Hudson: Rachel had said, "We'll give you this, but we want something more special than just a little vitrine in the hall." We wouldn't have a museum without this instrument

Jessica Vosk: *And Carnegie Hall came through. To do right by the treasures in their collection, they built an entire museum-the Rose Museum, named for Susan W. Rose, a Carnegie Hall trustee and longtime supporter and advocate for the Hall's collections.*

Gino Francesconi: And of course, yes, we had thousands of other artifacts, but it was his clarinet that inspired Susan and Elihu Rose to give us the money to actually build the museum itself. I love that because it shows the variety of our history that wasn't just classical music.

Jessica Vosk: *Rachel thought this was a perfect home for her father's clarinet.*

Rachel Edelson: It felt good to bequeath something to a place that helped make my father. And I certainly was well aware of the complex ways in which my father helped create American culture.

Jessica Vosk: *Rachel remembers the night she handed the clarinet to then president of the Hall, Isaac Stern.*

Rachel Edelson: This is the only picture I have of the evening when I dedicated my father's clarinet to Carnegie Hall and being metaphorically the "cornerstone" of the new

museum. I didn't have any fancy clothes, but fortunately, I had a good friend who did. And so what I wore, for some background, she had worn this dress at the party for after her son's Bar Mitzvah. And the dress is 100% silver sequins with a V-neck and a peplum, and it's down to the ground. I wore one of my mother's beautiful pink and yellow gold bracelets, and I wore shoes that were so agonizing that at the end of the evening, I really wanted to cut off my feet. So that's the outfit at Carnegie Hall.

RECORDING OF "STOMPING AT THE SAVOY" PERFORMED BY BENNY GOODMAN.

Jessica Vosk: *Building a new space was just the start, because taking care of such a special clarinet is no small feat - instruments are like living beings, they need to be played to be maintained. Gino had to familiarize himself with the instrument and he had to find the right people to care for it.*

Gino Francesconi: I did some research to find out who was the best in the city that worked with these instruments. And I promised that we would take care of it. And then every time a special clarinetist came to the hall, I would approach them and say the same thing, would you mind playing Benny Goodman's clarinet? Just so we could hear it and just so that it would keep it in its fingers.

Everybody who played it, and I had the clarinetist from the Chicago Symphony and several soloists play it. Every one of them said it was the finest Instrument they ever heard.

When you have these people looking at an instrument and they can tell you everything about it, and then they play it and they realize, oh my God, there's this legacy. There's this continuum. So, it's really extraordinary.

Jessica Vosk: *For Rachel, the clarinet will always make her think of her father. Because in their household, the instrument was a...*

Rachel Edelson: Holy, untouchable object. That's what comes about. And incredibly, I never asked my father how one plays a clarinet. It just never crossed my mind.

Jessica Vosk: *Tomoji Hirakata—Senior Technical Specialist for Yamaha Artist Services in New York City—knows clarinets well and he is part of the team that maintains Benny's clarinet at the Hall. He knows that each musician tailors their instrument to themselves, their body, what they want the sound to be. And Tomoji uncovers the ways they do that.*

Tomoji Hirakata: I feel like I'm doing an autopsy. The instrument's still alive. So this clarinet is so special.

Jessica Vosk: *Tomoji honors us by playing the clarinet, just for a moment. (We begged him to).*

Rob Hudson: No, I've never heard it. I've never heard this. Almost 25 years, and I ever heard this instrument. That's wonderful. Thank you.

RECORDING OF "MOONGLOW" PERFORMED BY BENNY GOODMAN.

Rachel Edelson: My father never talked about anything, including himself. So part of that is male reticence and I'm sure part of it is wanting to leave his childhood behind, a childhood when the other kids were out playing marbles, my father was inside practicing.

Sometimes, I've seen a couple of interviews, and people would say, "Benny, what if you hadn't been given a clarinet?" And he just rolled his eyes and think, "Jesus Christ, what a stupid question. I was given a clarinet!" And it was his way to express himself and to leave behind what he wanted to leave behind.

Jessica Vosk: *While the clarinet is so important to Carnegie Hall, it's really about what it represents.*

For one, hosting a swing concert at Carnegie Hall offered a deeper legitimacy to a musical genre that had been relegated to dance halls and nightclubs and broadened what's possible in a place like Carnegie Hall. Benny Goodman did that. Having a band of Black and white musicians playing together on stage, that too was remarkable. But maybe the clarinet represents something that is core to the archive, the preservation of history. How easily this record could have been lost forever! And that's true for every last scrap of history that has survived, and that can tell us about the past, our shared past. Those scraps survived because of a series of accidents, and because the right person at the right time decided to care. And that's what the archive represents, recovering these scraps of history that could easily be lost or forgotten for all of us to relive them once again and be reminded of the people who helped create the culture we live in today.

Rachel Edelson: Some people belong to history. People who change history belong to history, and my father changed history.

Jessica Vosk: *You've been listening to If This Hall Could Talk, a podcast from Carnegie Hall, where we take you on a journey through some of the most iconic pieces in our archives, the objects that set the foundation for what the Hall is today. For images of the artifacts and more information on Carnegie Hall's Rose Archives, please visit carnegiehall.org/history.*

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Thanks for listening. I’m Jessica Vosk.

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