

John Buchanan presents  
 A JOURNEY THROUGH THE  
 GREAT MUSIC OF THE  
**SWING ERA**  
 1935 – 1937  
 Volume 1 CD 1



By 1934 more than fourteen million radio sets were turned on daily across the United States. The Depression that had followed the stock market crash of 1929 had accelerated the growth in radio ownership and nearly every American home owned one. The NBC network conducted a survey of listeners' tastes and preferences, discovering that dance music was far and away the most popular type of radio program. The McCann-Erickson advertising agency sold the idea of developing a radio program of dance music to the National Biscuit Company. The program was to be called "Let's Dance," broadcasting three hours of dance music coast-to-coast every Saturday night over the network's more than fifty stations. Benny Goodman and his orchestra were chosen to provide the music for the hot dance band section of the broadcast. The "Let's Dance" program began broadcasting on 1 December 1934 and it was the nationwide broadcasts of Benny Goodman and his orchestra playing a new form of hot dance music, largely based on many arrangements supplied to him by pioneering black band leader Fletcher Henderson, that was to help launch what become to be known as the Swing Era, the first great period of popular music in the United States. The seeds of the Swing Era however, had been sown back in the 1920s when Fletcher Henderson and his pioneering dance band started to introduce hot improvised solos among the band's ensemble passages, particularly during the years 1924 and 1925 when Louis Armstrong had been a member of his band. Two of the three tunes featured here from the 1935 broadcasts were arranged by Fletcher and the other one by his brother Horace.

**Benny Goodman and his Orchestra** NBC's "Let's Dance" broadcasts April/May 1935  
 Pee Wee Erwin, Jerry Neary, Ralph Muzillo (t) Red Ballard, Jack Lacey (tb) Benny Goodman (cl)  
 Toots Mondello, Hymie Schertzer (as) Art Rollini, Dick Clark (ts) Frank Froeba (p) George Van Eps (g)  
 Harry Goodman (sb) Gene Krupa (d) Helen Ward (voc) Fletcher Henderson, Horace Henderson (arr)

1. **Introduction to "Let's Dance" radio program** (0:41) (Stone-Bonime-Baldrige)
2. **I GOT RHYTHM** (2:37) (Gershwin-Gershwin) arr FH
3. **LIVIN' IN A GREAT BIG WAY** (2:35) (McHugh-Fields) vocal HW arr FH
4. **WALK, JENNY WALK** (2:30) (Wooding-Schaffer) arr HH



Chick Webb led a band at the Savoy Ballroom in Harlem, a powerful orchestra, framed around Edgar Sampson's arrangements. Chick Webb's dynamic drumming set the standard for many other drummers during the years of the Swing Era. A diminutive hunchback, who died far too early of tuberculosis, he was universally admired for his forceful sense of swing, his technique and control of dynamics. By 1935 most swing bands, black and white, were featuring female vocalists. Chick engaged Ella Fitzgerald, a young singer who had just caught everyone's attention by winning an amateur singing contest at Harlem's Apollo Theatre. Ella's popularity would eventually lead the Chick Webb orchestra into its period of greatest success. These two songs came from Ella's first session with the band.

**Chick Webb and his Orchestra** New York 12 June 1935 Decca

Mario Bauza, Bobby Stark, Taft Jordan (t) Sandy Williams, Claude Jones (tb) Pete Clark (cl, as)  
 Edgar Sampson (as, arr) Elmer Williams (ts) Wayman Carver (ts, fl) Joe Steele (p) John Truehart (g)  
 Bill Thomas (sb) Chick Webb (d) Ella Fitzgerald (voc)

5. **I'LL CHASE THE BLUES AWAY** (2:32) (Sampson-Harrison) vocal EF arr ES

6. **LOVE AND KISSES** (3:17) (Curtis) vocal EF arr ES



By the middle of 1935 the Victor record people were excited by the sales of the Thomas "Fats" Waller records. Born in New York, Fats had played for his preacher father before, in the early 1920s, mixing with the pianists in Harlem, particularly James P Johnson, the pioneer of the "stride" playing style. In 1934 he formed a small group "Fats Waller and his Rhythm," an exciting group that largely kept him busy for the rest of his career. His personality and skill at the keyboard, coupled with an outrageous voice and his saucy asides, hit the ears of the record buying public like a bombshell. In June 1935 they recorded these two sides at the Victor studios in New Jersey, successfully capturing the happy mood that usually existed during a Fats Waller recording session.

**Fats Waller and his Rhythm** Camden, New Jersey 24 June 1935 Victor

Herman Autrey (t) Rudy Powell (cl, as) Fats Waller (p, voc) James Smith (g) Charles Turner (sb)  
 Arnold Boling (d)

7. **DINAH** (3:04) (Lewis-Young-Akst) vocal FW

8. **TAKE IT EASY** (3:08) (Fields-McHugh) vocal FW



Early in 1935 the Benny Goodman orchestra set out on a cross-country tour to capitalise on the success of their "Let's Dance" broadcasts. At their final Victor session before leaving New York they recorded two of the finest arrangements that Fletcher Henderson had produced for the band, "King Porter Stomp" and "Sometimes I'm Happy." Both tunes had been written back in the 1920s and Victor decided to release

them on one disc. The leading jazz magazine Downbeat proclaimed it "colossal" and Melody Maker magazine claimed, "It's a waste of time trying to describe this band; you will simply have to listen to it yourselves." Bunny Berigan's outstanding opening solo on "King Porter Stomp" virtually set the mood for the Swing Era that was to follow. Benny Goodman had been putting so much pressure on Fletcher Henderson to supply him with band arrangements that it had been necessary for Fletcher to call on brother Horace to give him a hand. "Sometimes I'm Happy" was an example of an arrangement completed by the two brothers.

### **Benny Goodman and his Orchestra** New York 1 July 1935 Victor

Bunny Berigan, Nate Kazebier, Ralph Muzillo (t) Red Ballard, Jack Lacey (tb) Benny Goodman (cl)  
Toots Mondello, Hymie Schertzer (as) Art Rollini, Dick Clark (ts) Frank Froeba (p) George Van Eps (g)  
Harry Goodman (sb) Gene Krupa (d) Fletcher Henderson, Horace Henderson (arr)

9. **KING PORTER STOMP** (3:08) (Morton) arr FH

10. **SOMETIMES I'M HAPPY** (3:41) (Robin-Grey-Youmans) arr FH and HH



The Goodman band's reception at the various dance-halls as they proceeded West on their cross-country tour was rather mixed until they reached the Palomar Ballroom in Los Angeles. Many of the proprietors across the country had wanted their dance bands to play a more gentle form of music, just waltzes and foxtrots, and were not pleased when Benny started playing their more up-tempo numbers. The "Let's Dance" program had gone to air at 10:30pm on Saturday night in New York whilst on the West Coast the broadcasts had been heard much earlier in the evening, enabling listeners, including young families and college students, to celebrate this exciting new music with their friends, some organising dance parties. To almost everyone's surprise a huge crowd welcomed the Benny Goodman orchestra at the Palomar on 21 August 1935. The band started the evening playing their milder arrangements but when the response to these numbers was tepid, according to the story, Benny said something like, "To hell with it, if we're going to sink we may as well go down swinging," and broke out with "King Porter Stomp" which was greeted with an enormous roar, and from that moment on there was no looking back. The success of the whole evening led to Benny's four week booking at the Palomar being extended to seven. It is generally agreed that the Swing Era was born that night at the Palomar. Benny Goodman and his orchestra had hit the jackpot.



Red Norvo and his wife Mildred Bailey frequently invited fellow musicians over to their house in Forest Hills, New York for dinner and a little after hours jamming. In June 1935 Benny Goodman and Teddy Wilson were guests one night and because Mildred believed that their musical styles and ideas naturally met, they were encouraged to join forces with Mildred's drummer-cousin for a spot of trio playing. It went so well that, a month later, Gene Krupa replaced the cousin and the Benny Goodman Trio made their recording debut.

**Benny Goodman Trio** New York 13 July 1935 Victor  
 Benny Goodman (cl) Teddy Wilson (p) Gene Krupa (d)

11. **AFTER YOU'VE GONE** (2:45) (Creamer-Layton)



Following his success at the Palomar on the West Coast, Benny Goodman took up an engagement at the Congress Hotel in Chicago. They had been booked into the Congress for one month but, when they continued to draw large crowds to the hotel and receive a great response to their NBC radio broadcasts, they ended up staying half a year. The band also put in a lot of time at Victor's local recording studio and over

the course of the engagement at the Congress they turned out almost two dozen new sides. The Congress engagement came to an end on 23 May and they returned to New York, where they recorded these two sides. Before moving to New York Benny had visited Chicago's Grand Terrace Ballroom and hired arranger Jimmy Mundy away from Earl Hines to work for him on a full-time basis. Mundy was a fast and prolific writer, Benny estimating that he produced some 400 charts during the three years he worked for him. More than forty of them were recorded. On 15 June Benny recorded two of the early Mundy charts, a Helen Ward vocal of "These Foolish Things," and a Jimmy Mundy arrangement of "Swingtime In The Rockies", a tune he had written and earlier recorded with the Earl Hines band under the title of "Take It Easy."

**Benny Goodman and his Orchestra** New York 15 June 1936 Victor  
 Nate Kazebier, Harry Geller, Chris Griffin (f) Red Ballard, Murray McEachern (tb) Benny Goodman (cl)  
 Hymie Schertzer, Bill De Pew (as) Art Rollini, Dick Clark (ts) Jess Stacy (p) Allen Reuss (g)  
 Harry Goodman (sb) Gene Krupa (d) Helen Ward (voc) Jimmy Mundy (arr)

12. **THESE FOOLISH THINGS** (2:41) (Marvell-Strachey-Link) vocal HW arr JM

13. **SWINGTIME IN THE ROCKIES** (3:08) (Goodman-Mundy) arr JM



By the summer of 1936 the Benny Goodman orchestra was again playing at the Palomar. Lionel Hampton was leading his own nine-piece band at the Paradise Club, a seedy sailor bar that attracted an up-market Hollywood crowd. After visiting the Paradise to hear Lionel play, members of the Goodman band suggested that Benny should drop in to hear him perform. Benny was impressed and asked Lionel if he would record a tune with the trio the following morning. "Moonglow" was the tune they

chose to record and according to Benny, "it was the story of the trio all over again – one of those natural things that was just meant to be." Five days after that first quartet recording Benny brought Lionel back for more. Benny invited Lionel to join him in New York that fall on a regular basis, making the new Benny Goodman Quartet. like the Trio, a regular feature of the Benny Goodman congregation.

**Benny Goodman Quartet** Hollywood 21 August 1936 Victor  
 Benny Goodman (cl) Teddy Wilson (p) Gene Krupa (d) Lionel Hampton (vib)

14. **MOONGLOW** (3:22) (Hudson-DeLange-Mills)



John Hammond, a young wealthy impresario who championed Benny Goodman, Billie Holiday, Count Basie and others during the Swing Era organised this Billy Holiday session with a group of musicians drawn from the Cab Calloway and Benny Goodman orchestras. This was the seventh session he had helped arrange with Billie Holiday and the Teddy Wilson orchestra. At this stage of her career, Billie was beginning to record better material, a sure sign that she had arrived. Both of these tunes came from leading Tin Pan Alley songwriters. "Easy To Love" provides a great example of the unique Billie Holiday style. She takes the first four bars, alters the melody line, the phrases and even the set pauses. On "The Way You Look Tonight," Billie, instead of embellishing the tune, strips it to its essentials, reshaping it within the requirements of her interpretation.

**Teddy Wilson and his Orchestra** New York 21 October 1936 Brunswick  
 Irving Randolph (t) Vido Musso (cl) Ben Webster (ts) Teddy Wilson (p) Allan Ruess (g)  
 Milton Hilton (sb) Gene Krupa (d) Billie Holiday (voc)

15. **EASY TO LOVE** (3:09) (Porter) vocal BH

16. **THE WAY YOU LOOK TONIGHT** (2:58) (Fields/Kern) vocal BH



John Hammond had been listening to his car radio in the car park of the Congress Hotel in Chicago when he heard Count Basie and his Barons of Rhythm playing at the Reno Club in Kansas City. By accident he had hit upon radio station W9XBY and was instantly captivated by the purity and economy of Count Basie's piano playing. Despite the fact that Basie had already signed a contract with Decca, Hammond seized a chance to record at least part of the band in Chicago before they moved to New York and into the Decca

contract. One morning he assembled five members of the Basie band into a studio in Chicago to record three tunes under the name of "Jones-Smith Incorporated," using the names of the the trumpet player and drummer on the date. It was an original way to introduce Count Basie and four of his finest band members to the wider American public.

**Jones-Smith Incorporated** Chicago 9 November 1936 Vocalion  
 Carl Smith (t) Lester Young (ts) Count Basie (p) Walter Page (sb) Jo Jones (d)

17. **SHOE-SHINE BOY** (2:56) (Cahn/Chaplin)
18. **LADY BE GOOD** (3:05) (Gershwin/Gershwin)



The first "Tommy Dorsey Show" on NBC's Blue Network of stations opened with a swing arrangement of the haunting theme from Nicholas Rimsky-Korsakov's "Song Of India" and a new arrangement of Irving Berlin's "Marie," a tune originally written as a waltz. Tommy had borrowed the idea for the arrangement of "Marie" when his band had appeared on the same program as "The Sunset Royal Orchestra" in Philadelphia. The Sunset Royals had played the tune in 4/4 time, mainly as an instrumental, then with the whole band singing a counter melody behind the main vocalist. Bunny Berigan had

been planning to put his own band together but Tommy talked him into leading his trumpet section during the early months of 1937. On both of these numbers Bunny produced two of the most famous trumpet solos in jazz history. Downbeat Readers' Poll picked "Song of India", second only to Benny Goodman's "Sing, Sing, Sing" as the best big band arrangement of the year and "Marie" became the most popular record in the country for two weeks early in 1938. The two-sided record containing both tunes sold over 150,000 copies at a time when a successful record was selling around 20,000.

**Tommy Dorsey and his Orchestra** New York 29 January 1937 Victor  
 Bunny Berigan, Jimmy Welch, Joe Bauer, Bob Cusumano (t) Tommy Dorsey (tb, arr)  
 Les Jenkins, Red Bone (tb) Joe Dixon (cl, as) Fred Stulce, Clyde Rounds (as) Bud Freeman (ts)  
 Dick Jones (p) Carmen Mastren (g) Gene Traxler (sb) Dave Tough (d) Jack Leonard (voc)

19. **SONG OF INDIA** (3:07) (Rimsky-Korsakov) arr TD
20. **MARIE** (3:17) (Berlin) vocal JL and chorus



The Chick Webb band gained wonderful exposure to the public when playing at the Savoy Ballroom with eight slots a week on radio, more than any other big band, white or coloured. During the 1930s many famous orchestras were brought to the Savoy Ballroom to compete in "Battle of the Bands" contests with Chick and his orchestra. Rarely did the visitors win. Three of the most notorious battles were those held in February, March and May of 1937 against Fletcher Henderson, Duke Ellington and Benny Goodman. The battle against Goodman became a particularly memorable event of the

Swing Era when a crowd of more than 4,000 broke the attendance record at the Savoy, with 5,000 being turned away. In March the Chick Webb orchestra went into the Decca studio to record a Teddy McRae-Bud Green ballad, sung by Ella Fitzgerald, and an instrumental number that must have served Chick and his band very well when competing with others in the "Battle of the Bands" contests at the Savoy.

**Chick Webb and his Orchestra** New York 24 March 1937 Decca

Mario Bauza, Bobby Stark, Taft Jordan (t) Sandy Williams, Nat Story (tb) Pete Clark (cl, as, bs) Louis Jordan (as, voc) Ted McRae (ts) Wayman Carver (ts) Tommy Fulford (p) John Trueheart (g) Beverley Peer (sb) Chick Webb (d) Ella Fitzgerald (voc)

21. **YOU SHOWED ME THE WAY** (3:06) (Green-McRae) vocal EF

22. **CLAP HANDS! HERE COMES CHARLIE** (2:31) (Meyer-Rose-McDonald)



When John Hammond first heard Count Basie's band broadcasting from Kansas City he set in train a national tour beginning in New York. Initially the band did not impress, their free blowing Kansas City style lacking the discipline and precision that was required to compete with the other top bands in New York. However, by gradually making a number of personnel changes, taking advice from Hammond and others, Count Basie had by 1937, put together a very fine unit with a very distinctive style. Buck Clayton, Ed Lewis and Bobby Moore made up the trumpet section and Herschel Evans and Lester Young made up a great tenor sax duo. The rhythm section, made of Freddie

Green on guitar, Walter Page on the bass and Jo Jones on the drums supporting the Count on piano, gave the band a great foundation.

**Count Basie and his Orchestra** New York 26 March 1937 Decca

Buck Clayton, Ed Lewis, Bobby Moore (t) George Hunt, Dan Minor (tb) Caughy Roberts (as) Jack Washington (as, bar) Herschel Evans, Lester Young (cl, ts) Count Basie (p, ldr) Freddie Green (g) Walter Page (sb) Joe Jones (d) Jimmy Rushing (voc)

23. **EXACTLY LIKE YOU** (2:45) (Fields-McHugh) vocal JR

24. **THE GLORY OF LOVE** (2:33) (Hill)



Billie Holiday was singing with the Count Basie band in New York when she took time off for this recording session with Teddy Wilson and his orchestra in June 1937. Buck Clayton, Lester Young and other friends from the Count Basie organisation became members of the Teddy Wilson orchestra for the occasion. The whole thing just fell into place despite the fact that John Hammond had always felt that some of the Basie musicians were a little uncomfortable playing with Teddy Wilson. Used to the hard-driving Kansas City style, anchored by the Count's economical, metronomic rhythm, Hammond felt that they might become disconcerted by Teddy's delicate, lacy patterns. In "Foolin' Myself," Lester Young plays the

melody as straight as any dance band musician, yet his solo remains an example of the essence of jazz and on "Easy Living" Billie sounds as if she had been honing the song to perfection for years.

**Teddy Wilson and his Orchestra** New York 1 June 1937 Brunswick

Buck Clayton (t) Buster Bailey (cl) Lester Young (ts) Teddy Wilson (p) Freddie Green (g) Walter Page (sb)  
Joe Jones (d) Billie Holiday (voc)

25. **FOOLIN' MYSELF** (3:00) (Tinturin-Lawrence) vocal BH

26. **EASY LIVING** (3:02) (Robin-Rainger) vocal BH