MORE than a decade has passed since Benny Goodman and his band gave a memorable concert in staid Carnegie Hall, but the acclaim today is greater than it was then. Album sales of it have topped 60,000 sets.
shining splendor in smoke-filled night clubs and mammoth barns of dance halls.

The Goodman album is a period piece in the most affectionate sense of the term. It is a stabling reminder that the dance band business virtually has vanished since 1938.

There was a time when dance bands were big and something not to be missed. Even their names were imposing and, for years, a dance band was never merely a band or an orchestra—that is, so-and-so's band or orchestra.

It was always the Scranton Siens, the University Six, the Variety Eight, the Kansas City Haws, the Ohio Lucky Seven, the Wolverines, the Peerless Players, the California Ramblers, the Band of Renown, the Band of a Thousand Melodies, the Casa Loma, the Memphis Five, the New Orleans Rhythm Kings, the Original Dixieland Jass [sic] Band, and countless Society Orchestras. And it was not Rudy Vallee and His Orchestra, either, but Rudy Vallee and His Connecticut Yankees. And, for that matter, time was when even Whitman, who was first The King of Jazz and afterwards The Dean of Modern American Music, went in for the department of fuller explanation and had himself billed as Paul Whiteman and his Palais Royale Orchestra.

Now—at least in the big time—there are only Guy Lombardo and his Royal Canadians and Phil Spitalny and his Hour-of-Charm All-Girl Orchestra, which, everything considered, may be just as well. Goodman, however, always has been simply Benny Goodman and his Orchestra. But that, as anyone more than 30 must realize, always has been sufficient.

Goodman, one of 14 children, was born in the Chicago ghetto in 1909. At ten, he already had begun to study the clarinet and was playing regularly with a group of boys at his synagogue.

By the time he was 12, he was earning money imitating Ted Lewis in a Chicago theater.

Somewhere along the line, he met up with the now legendary Austin High School musical gang, which included such future jazz greats as Bud Freeman, Jimmy McPartland, and the late Frank Teschemacher and Dave Tough. It was there that he acquired a taste for hot jazz.

When the time arrived for him to take his first job with a professional band, Goodman was still so small that he had to have his tuxedo made to order. (He was only 13, incidentally, when he took out his first card in the musicians' union.)

On Aug. 8, 1923, he was hired to play with a group that worked on an excursion boat. Showing up on the scene, Goodman, who was now a fast 14, stepped onto the bandstand and sat down there.

Suddenly a voice barked, “Get off that stand and stop messin' 'round with those instruments.”

The command came from Bix Biderbecke, whose bizarre ways and silvery cornet were to make him the most fabled figure in the history of jazz.

From that point on, Goodman made rapid progress. For a while, he played with Ben Pollack's band, the first large white combination to play authentic jazz. When the band moved to New York to work at the Park Central Hotel, he was one of its most dazzling ornaments. After that, he went into the Hollywood Restaurant with Red Nichols, a man whose name may not mean much to the kids, but is sheer glory to practically anyone who has reached the age of 40.

Nichols was a prolific recording artist and Goodman appeared on most of his dates. No record collection that pretends to have at

When Goodman opened at the Paramount Theater in New York his followers carried away by the music, danced in the aisles

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least a smattering of abiding jazz is complete without a quota of Nichols’ records. The ones that feature Goodman — “China Boy,” for example—are part of the work-in-progress that achieved its full flowering the night of Jan. 16, 1938, at Carnegie Hall.

These were wonderful years—chiefly, perhaps, because they were unspoiled. Collegians from Princet-
on and Yale used to come into New York City and see shows like “Girl Crazy” and “Strike Up the Band,” not be-cause George Gershwin had written the music, but because Goodman was in the pit band. There were even a certain number who listened to Rubinstein and his violin on the Chase and Sanborn program merely in the hope that Goodman, who was a more-or-less regular member of the band, might be allowed to improvise for a few bars.

It was at this period that he be- came a giant to the ears of the undergraduates who are now approaching middle age. The prodigious sale of the Carnegie Hall album is probably testimony to the fact that they have never wavered in their devotion.

For all their enchantment, how- ever, these years had not produced, with the exception of Ben Pol- lac’s, an organized (as opposed to small improvisational groups) white band that could play jazz. There were some topnotch colored or- ganizations, of course—Fletcher Henderson’s, Duke Ellington’s, Chick Webb’s, and so forth—but the only white ensemble that even essayed the hot idiom was the Casa Loma, which was the campus favorite circa 1932.

It was his dissatisfaction with the Casa and his admiration for the likes of Henderson and Webb that made Goodman particularly eager to form a band of his own. In November, 1933, he made two records with a small group—“Aintcha Glad” and “I Gotta Right to Sing the Blues”—which caused quite a stir among hot fans when they were released on the Columbia label. On the strength of their popularity and his own assiduous- ness, he was signed early in 1934 to take a large band into Billy Rose’s Manhattan Music Hall.

It was not until December of the same year, though, that he re-ceived what was later to prove his most important assignment. The National Biscuit Company bought three hours—from 11 p.m. to 2 a.m.—each Saturday on NBC and decided to make them into a pro- gram of dance music. (This was at

A period when the late evening air was filled with superb jazz.) The program was to be divided into seg- ments of rumba, sweet, and hot music, to be played, respectively, by Xavier Cugat, Kel Murray, and Goodman.

Nothing like the Goodman band had ever been heard on a sponsored broadcast before. It had the leader’s own whirr of dishevel of a clarinet, some superb instrumentalists, and a singer named Helen Ward, who was later to beguile the nation with her rendition of “Goodie Goodie.” It also had arrangements by Fletcher Henderson which not only swung, but had exquisite melodic patterns.

A few months later, the band was hired to play at the Roosevelt Hotel. Some of the patrons appa- rently resented the intrusion of a loud (and, to their ears) screeching band into a room made sacrosanct by Guy Lombardo and his music. Cards were distributed to the tables announcing: “Mr. Goodman will be pleased to play your favorite musical numbers.”

A customer named Paul Bill- amher from Douglaston, N.Y., sub- mitted a request which Goodman still has in his scrapbook. “Just by way of contrast,” it read, “something sweet and low.”

In June, 1935, the Goodman band, having flopped at the Roose- velt, began to work its way to the West Coast on a string of one-nighters. Things went too well along the route, but it was not until it opened at Elitch Gardens in Denver that Goodman suffered what might have been the final in-dignity. At the end of the first half-hour (during which such stars as Jess Stacy, the pianist, Bunny Berigan, the trumpeter, Teddy Wilson, the pianist in the trio, and Gene Krupa, the drum- mer, had played at the height of their form) the indignant manager of the place rushed up to Goodman.

“What’s the matter?” he de- manded hotly. “Can’t you boys play any waltzes?”

Goodman wanted to quit, but he was finally prevailed on by his New York manager to stick out the tour until the band opened at the Palomar in Los Angeles.

Few bands have ever received the ovation accorded Goodman’s by the crowd at the Palomar the night of Aug. 21, 1935. As it turned out, the band had become popular on the West Coast because of the difference in time between there and New York.

The Let’s Dance program, which came on the air in the East at an hour when many people had retired for the night, was heard in California from 8 until 11 p.m., and had thereby attracted an enor- mous audience. From the Palomar engagement on, the success of the Goodman band was assured. So, too, was the almost fanatical popularity of the music known as swing.

Those were barrel house times. Kids who might otherwise have dreamed of growing up to be a Babe Ruth now yearned to play drums like Gene Krupa, who once con- fided to an interviewer that he kept repeating, “I’m gonna have potatoes and some pork chops” while he champed his gum and whirled out fantastic rhythmic patterns.

No aware adolescent of that roaring age would have been caught dead referring to Goodman as anything but “Benny” or “B.O.” You said “Benny” and nobody but a square thought you meant Jack Benny.

All over the United States, swing—or, to put it more precisely, hot jazz—became the rage. In New York City, West 52nd Street became the shrine. On Sundays, most of the hot musicians around town would turn up at the Hickory House for breakfast and a chance to “sit in” with the band.

Although it was scarcely jazz, there was a tune out of that era that captured the mad spirit. It was called “The Music Goes Round and Round” and there has never been anything quite like it. Every week end, the low-crust yo-yo who would come up from Princeton or down from New Haven with their young ladies and they would “make” the jazz places.

Now these couples are older by 13 years and for them the Goodman album is reassurance that maybe they did not waste their college years after all. For what they listened to was jazz.

There was a night that a lot of them must remember. This was when the late Red MacKenzie was running a hole-in-the-wall on 52nd Street. All the musicians gathered there, because it was a place that was somehow condu- cive to good jazz.

Bergan, a tall, ambling man, was a regular there and nine, may- be ten, times a night, night in night out, he had them screaming for his heartbeat again “I Can’t Get Started.”

But on this particular night there was a young and unknown trombonist on the stand, and he was a real treat. Then the great
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