

IN MEMORIAM

Mr. Golson has been a very important part of my soundtrack in life. The first formal introduction to him and his music was through my musical daddy and teacher Donald Washington, playing an a cappella version of Mr. Golson's "Blues March", which was soulful to say the least. I recall receiving my first Jamey Aebersold book of Golson's compositions, which I was excited to get under my fingers. Fast forward to the '90s in NYC, where he heard about me and put this album together called *Tenor Legacy* (1998). Along with Mr. Golson was Harold Ashby, Branford Marsalis and myself! It was such an honor to be in the presence of, let alone recording with, these great men of the tenor saxophone. Over the years since that recording, I'd run into Mr. Golson infrequently, but the last time was in 2023 at the Apollo Theater for a Jazz Foundation of America event. We shared pleasantries and I got the latest hip words from him!

—JAMES CARTER (saxophones)

I met Benny as a sophomore in college, when he came to rehearse the ensemble I was in to play some of his music. Needless to say, I was quite intimidated even though he was so easygoing and receptive. Subsequently, I heard him hundreds of times live over the years. I even got to play with him in Marciac, France in 2014. He presented me with a set list backstage that consisted of many of his original compositions, and I was pleased to tell him I knew them all and the harmony parts as well: I was so enamored of his work and compositional legacy that I made sure I knew absolutely everything he composed! It was such a thrill to play with him and I'm so happy and very grateful for that opportunity. He's not only such a giant of the saxophone, but his compositions are part of the standard repertoire. He was a genius musician and had tremendous integrity as well as a kind and nurturing nature. I will miss him.

—ERIC ALEXANDER (tenor saxophone)

Benny Golson was just a masterful musician. He carved his own niche in the music world. Though humble and quiet, people quickly realized how beautiful, amazing and how very special he was. He walked among the highest-ranking musicians in and beyond the Philadelphia area where, like me, he was from. As I was growing into the music scene, I was trying to make it to wherever and whenever he was playing, practicing or just hanging out. I think of the time when he became aware of Lee Morgan and when Dizzy came to town and discovered both of them. They joined Dizzy's band at the same time, along with drummer Charli Persip. Those were three characters who were right in tune: the three musketeers I called them. There was one time I remember, when Benny was supposed to take a solo, but those pranksters took off his mouthpiece when he didn't notice, put cellophane wrapper in it and placed his mouthpiece back on the horn! When it came time for Benny to grab his horn to play with the band, he couldn't get any air through it! I like to remember funny moments like this, along with the great musical moments.

Benny Golson will be sorely missed by the entire music world and I am glad to have been a friend of his. The kind of person he was is the kind of person we need more of in this music and in this world.

—REGGIE WORKMAN (bass)

Mr. Benny Golson: Thank you! Your musicianship, professionalism and humanity paved the way for me personally and I am fortunate to have known you.

—JAVON JACKSON (tenor saxophone)

Benny Golson was one of my mentors. A consummate musician, composer and consummate "gentle man", two words. Every stroke of his pen turned out to be a classic. It was a pleasure of mine to stand next to him on the bandstand and I learned so much from him, to create solos and to make music a living presence. He was master at that. God bless Benny, from me and the whole music community.

—EDDIE HENDERSON (trumpet)

I first met Benny Golson, one of the heavyweights of the tenor saxophone, in 1956, when I had just come to New York City from Detroit. He was then appearing with the Dizzy Gillespie Big Band. We had a magnificent, good feeling on and off the bandstand and a very nice relationship since that time, even though I unfortunately never had the opportunity to record with him. I've been fortunate to record with many of the greats, but as the saying goes: the best are the ones we miss! This month I am proud to accept the "Benny Golson Jazz Master Award" (the annual award given to jazz giants since 1996) from Howard University, where Benny was an alumnus. He had a good run, but I will miss him.

—LOUIS HAYES (drums)



BENNY GOLSON
1929-2024

Benny was a great artist, a gentleman of the highest order, and a close friend of mine throughout his life. He remembered Clifford, and now we remember Benny.

—**SONNY ROLLINS (tenor saxophone)**

Benny Golson's tunes came from his heart and soul but were always a little different than anyone else's. He had a melodic and harmonic genius that I think is right up there with all the greats like Ellington, Silver and Shorter. Like his playing, his compositions and arrangements had that unmistakable Benny Golson sound.

I was a young man when he called me to make a recording with him. That was my first gig, after which he kept me there for the rest of his life. That kind of support and loyalty is extremely rare in this business. Sure, you might work with many great players — but not for the rest of their lives. Because of that, Benny was there for many of the most important episodes of my life. I was on the road with him when I found out my wife was pregnant with my daughter Mary. He was the first person I told. He was always there for me: when things went down a different road for us because of Mary's premature birth and her entry into the world of the disabled. I was in touch with Benny throughout that experience and I still have some of the beautiful emails he would write me. He had the patience of Job and the wisdom of a sage. His eloquence gave him the ability to say something helpful in such a substantive way it really made a difference. I found myself recalling his exact words over and over again when I needed a boost of spirit.

What I saw in Benny Golson the person was as pure and as real as it gets. Someone whose kindness had no self-motivation but was simply in his DNA. A gentle soul with a brilliant mind. A frustrated Shakespearean actor whose soliloquies told the history of this music from someone that lived it. His daughter Brielle told me even though his body was breaking down, his mind was sharp right to the end. I take comfort in the fact that he passed away at home with family. He went to sleep forever but he left us here with an incredible body of work, and, for those of us lucky enough to have known him, memories that bring warmth to your heart and a smile to your face.

—**MIKE LEDONNE (piano, organ)**

My most vivid memory of Benny Golson was backstage in June 1956 when he came to the old upright piano and played what he had just finished that day — "I Remember Clifford". All of Oscar Pettiford's Orchestra: Sahib Shihab, Tommy Flanagan, Art Farmer, Osie Johnson, French hornist Julius Watkins, composer-pianists Tadd Dameron and Thelonious Monk all crowded around the piano along with Gigi Gryce and Ray Copeland to hear Benny playing his beautiful tribute to Clifford Brown, who had just died in an automobile accident. The Town Hall Concert, booked as an Easter Jazz Festival, featuring Oscar's new orchestra and Monk's quintet, became a tribute to Clifford, and all of us who heard Benny play this tune will never forget that moment of hearing it played backstage. Sixty-three years later, in 2019, I did a program with Benny Golson for LiLY (Lifeforce in Later Years), which helps elderly people in NYC. Since Benny credited one of their doctors with saving his life, he was happy to be there and, as always, played up a storm! When I reminded him of that memorable night back in 1956 when he first played "I Remember Clifford" for all of us gathered around the piano, he said, "Never forgot that either and still think of him all the time. It was a blessing knowing him." Now we can feel the same way about Benny, not only as an amazing composer-arranger-player-bandleader-visionary, but as a great generous person and true gentleman, always gracious to everyone. We'll all remember Benny.

—**DAVID AMRAM**

(French horn, multi-instrumentalist, composer)

Having Benny Golson as a mentor, a leader and total inspiration has been a true blessing in my life for many years. I am, most definitely, a better person and certainly a better musician having been in his presence each occasion. Benny Golson was one of the most intelligent, kindest, and humorous individuals I have ever known. Every time we would speak, he would encourage and empower me to continue whatever I did as a player and composer. I will always cherish and dearly miss our phone conversations. The jazz community has lost a true giant of a human being through his masterful compositions, his incredible underrated saxophone playing and his musicianship. Any player studying and performing any Benny Golson composition will always project a sincerity and seriousness to the listening audience. His music demands it forever!

—**RUFUS REID (bass)**

I remember the first time I got the call from Benny to play with him. Cannonball Adderley had a series for Riverside Records called "Cannonball Presents", to get folks to hear certain groups and musicians that were coming up and who he felt should be heard. Included in this series was the first album I ever recorded on: The Mangione Brothers' *The Jazz Brothers* (1960). Because of this release, I went with the group to New York to play a concert at The Five Spot, and Benny came to that gig to hear Chuck Mangione play. He was so impressed with my playing that he called me soon thereafter to join his and Art Farmer's Jazztet. The call, however, was actually a call to audition for the band, which was at Birdland. They put me up at a hotel across the street from the club and said to meet at 1 pm. So, I left my hotel that day and crossed the street, only to see all these musicians lined up outside. They said they were auditioning: trombonists, pianists and drummers and we were each brought in one at a time. I will never forget what he said to me after all the auditions: "Rochester Flash! You got the gig." Ten days later, we opened up opposite his Philadelphia friend, John Coltrane. And that's when we first started working together, in 1961, and for about the next two years with The Jazztet. And those years were a big turning point in my career. I then joined Sonny Rollins but would work on and off with Benny up until 2018, when we played a roving Jazz Bakery concert, and then at SOCA University with Kenny Barron. We became really good friends over the years. He would always have great comments for me after every time we played. He would call me up the next day or write me a note: "I love what you're doing" and "I love the way you play" and "Don't forget to bring that cymbal!" (I had a flat cymbal, with three rivets in it, and he loved hearing me play on it a soft swinging, as he put it, "tip-tip-tip-tip"!). He would always offer comments that would help. "Just play you, and swing!", he would say. I sure had fun playing behind him. Benny was the nicest, warmest guy. He'd say to me, "Man I miss you, can't wait to play with you again." That's just how he was. I'm going to miss all those calls, those notes and his personality.

—**ROY MCCURDY (drums)**

I carry some glory of association with Jazz Master Benny Golson in my heart always and hope it comes through in my personal expression. The "School of Golson:" beauty of sound, technical and intellectual sophistication, majestic storytelling as an improviser and composer, and always moving forward as a focus. He had a thirst for knowledge and was inspired to constantly create. His warm smile, wit and embrace was felt by everyone in his audience. Benny was always playing and composing with an open idea of not just what it is, but asked the question, "What could it be?" He was also a great humanitarian in all respects, full of love. Thanks Benny, for all the lessons in the School of Golson. RIP Maestro.

—**JOE LOVANO (tenor saxophone)**

Benny Golson was always such a great friend. I remember once when I was at his place, we were going through Benny Golson classics in preparation for a concert, when he suggested we play one of my tunes ("For Better or Worse"). I was stunned and said, "Are you kidding me?!" That was one of the greatest compliments I have gotten from anyone, as he was my hero, and of course one of jazz' greatest composers ever. He was the first musical director for Art Blakey and The Jazz Messengers, providing in the short time span of a few years such a huge portion of the band's book. I played with Golson and Blakey separately, though Benny was present when I played with Art, with whom I worked with for four years. One time, Benny climbed up onstage, embraced me and thanked me for playing his "I Remember Clifford". It's funny because when I started playing with Blakey, I was featured on a ballad of my own choosing every night. But when I first started with "I Remember Clifford", from that point on that was what I always played. Without any false modesty, Blakey loved that feature for me and never asked me again what I was going to play: he would just announce my name and "I Remember Clifford"! I would later form the My Father Who Art Blakey Big Band, which featured Benny playing on his "Blues March", as well as "Moanin'" (which he helped pianist-composer Bobby Timmons to write the bridge for). My quintet will be doing a tribute to Golson this month (Nov. 15) at the Asser Levy Recreation Center. It will be nice to remember him in music.

—**VALERY PONOMAREV (trumpet)**

I met Maestro Golson in 2008 when I was a student at Berklee College of Music and he was the guest artist one week. I had the honor of performing with him, along with a group of students, playing classics like "I Remember Clifford", "Stablemates" and "Along Came Betty". What left the greatest impression was his kindness and presence. Every time he walked into a room, it felt like the energy shifted — he just made everyone feel special. And his stories were not only entertaining but filled with wisdom. One lesson that stuck with me, was when he said that he wrote over 150 versions of "Stablemates" before he was satisfied! It taught me the importance of growth and persistence. I'm incredibly grateful to have shared that moment with him, as it remains one of the most beautiful experiences of my life.

—**MELISSA ALDANA (tenor saxophone)**

Benny Golson lived half a block from my mother's home in Philadelphia and he would pass along so much information to me. Not only was he one of the great minds, but he was a great composer and arranger. I was inspired by both his musical genius and his commitment to use his artistry to speak to the social and political issues of his time. He was very special, such an individual. It was around 1959 when I first heard him, which was in The Jazztet with Art Farmer. And when John Coltrane went to New York to go play with Miles and asked me to finish out his tour with Jimmy Smith, it was then that my name got around — and Benny Golson was a big part of that. In 2000, I had the opportunity to go on tour with Benny for two months, a group for which he arranged the music of Dizzy Gillespie and Charlie Parker solos: that experience was like going to the highest jazz university in the whole world! He had a beautiful sound and great technique. I was inspired by all his scales, his entire concept of playing the tenor saxophone and by the way he treated his saxophone. The tenor saxophone they say is the closest saxophone to the human voice. Well, Benny Golson captured that. He played from the bottom of the instrument to the altissimo range and that was nothing short of extraordinary. Benny Golson had his own sound and with his passing, we have lost one of the greatest lives this country has ever produced.

—**ODEAN POPE (tenor saxophone)**