

## Questions to Mr Benny GOLSON

**Question:** Mr Benny Golson, we are very happy to welcome you in Tunisia. Your concerts in Tunisia won't only be a tribute to Clifford Brown but to all great musicians with whom you worked and who marked the history of jazz in Tunisia, we think of Dizzy Gillespie, Art Blakey,....

**Response:** Thank you very much for your warm welcome to your country. You are right, the We Remember Clifford project not only celebrates the great artistry of Clifford Brown but is also a salute to some of the great musicians I have had the good fortune to work with, including Coleman Hawkins, Art Blakey, Dizzy Gillespie, Tadd Dameron, Lionel Hampton, Milt Jackson, Quincy Jones, Freddie Hubbard, Curtis Fuller, McCoy Tyner and Art Farmer.

**Question:** Isn't this tribute to Clifford Brown, one to a whole era and a City "Philly city" where many great musicians settled down?

**Response:** Yes, we also pay tribute to Philadelphia, birthplace of so many legendary jazz musicians, including Stan Getz, Philly Joe Jones, Lee Morgan, Ray Bryant, Tommy Potter, Bobby Timmons, Shirley Scott, Ziggy Elman, Jimmy Woode and Red Rodney. Philadelphia was the places to which Clifford Brown moved in 1948 and where he played gigs with Miles Davis and Fats Navarro. It is also the place where I was born.

**Question:** What do you think of the evolution of jazz?

**Response:** I think jazz has evolved extremely well. You know, despite all the pessimists who claim from time to time that jazz is dead, this beautiful music, which emerged from New Orleans more than a century ago, will live on for ever – especially when there are such accomplished practitioners around as, for example, those in the We Remember Clifford group!

**Question:** Do you think it is easier for you to be famous today?

**Response:** Becoming famous is not something one particularly aims at. You take up a profession which makes a strong appeal to you and you do your best to excel at that calling. If it happens that your music finds a positive response from the public, then you achieve a certain level of respect and approval. But celebrity has never been my goal – I just want to express myself musically to the best of my ability and hope that it finds favour with the public.

**Question:** Why did you choose to live both in Los Angeles and New York and what are your activities there?

**Response:** I chose to have home in both cities for different reasons. New York is still the most important jazz center in the United States and Los Angeles is a good place to relax – and it also has some good jazz venues in the locality, where I like to play – such as Yoshi's in Oakland.

**Question:** You have played many times with Clifford Brown. Can you tell us about your relationship with him and his influence upon your music? Have you ever recorded with him?

**Response:** I first met Clifford Brown in Philadelphia in 1946 when he was about 16. I especially remember the first meeting between Clifford and his great hero, Fats

Navarro, in a Philadelphia club. The two trumpet men were booked at the club together with an alto saxophonist and a rhythm section.

Being the star, Fats Navarro took the first solo – and then Clifford began to play – and, I can tell you, Clifford was really holding his own and Fats was highly impressed by the young player.

Then, in 1953, I was playing dates with Tadd Dameron's band, which also included Clifford Brown and we recorded "The Arranger's Touch" for the Prestige label. A couple of years later I renewed my connection with Clifford when I wrote the number "Step Lightly", which was featured on the EmArcy album "Clifford Brown & Max Roach At Basin Street". And, in 1958, I made my first recording of "I Remember Clifford" – a composition of which I am very proud. There have been 334 different recordings of that piece.

The day after Clifford's fatal accident, I was appearing with the Dizzy Gillespie Big Band at the Apollo Theater in Harlem. After the intermission at the end of the first show, the band was preparing to go back on stage when Walter Davis Jr. came rushing into the backstage area and cried, "Have you heard? Brownie was killed yesterday in a car accident!"

None of us could believe it. We froze in total shock. Somehow we got back on to the stage to begin the second show, the curtain went up and many of the musicians were crying as they played. I told myself I was having a nightmare. But the next morning the papers reported Brownie's death. For some time after that, all we could talk about was Clifford Brown.

He was an enormously accomplished musician who, in a very short space of time, made a tremendous impact on the jazz scene. The rich legacy of his recordings – around 25 albums made in a time-span of four years – is truly one to be treasured."In my view, Clifford Brown was a genius.

**Question:** We cannot speak about Clifford Brown without mentioning the duo C. Brown - Max Roach?

· After Clifford's death, Max had a nervous breakdown and he tried to revive the spirit of his lost friend.

Do you have any news of Max Roach?

**Response:** Yes, Max was really devastated by the news of Clifford's death. As well as being wonderfully compatible musicians, they were very close friends. In the space of 22 months, the Clifford Brown-Max Roach Quintet won recognition as one of the outstanding jazz groups of the 1950s and one which played a leading role in the establishment of the hard bop school of jazz. And its co-leaders were widely acknowledged as master of their respective instruments.

**Question:** When we speak about Clifford Brown, we think of two other trumpet players who have marked your career : Dizzy Gillespie and mainly Art Farmer. Can you tell us about your relationship with them? Any funny stories with them?

**Response:** Getting to play with the legendary Dizzy Gillespie was really a high point in my career. He was not only a uniquely innovative musician and composer, but also a larger-than-life personality who brought a lot of humour into his work. I first joined the Dizzy Gillespie Big Band in 1956 and, in that same year, we made a State Department tour of South America – which was a great experience. I was with the band until it broke up in 1958 and recorded six albums with Dizzy.

**Question:** What about your collaboration with Mr Art Farmer within the legendary Jazztet?

1. the specificity of the Jazztet, is that it was against the current trends of that time (the funk of Blakey Art and Horatio Silver). What were the artistic trends of Jazztet?

2. Were you the composer and the arranger of the group?

3. You gave a great importance to the arrangement, that's why you didn't hesitate to work with John Lewis (the theme of "Django" is one among others).

**Response:** Yes, the Jazztet was something of a departure from the funky music of Art Blakey and Horace Silver – more melodic and, perhaps, a little more sophisticated. But the essential spirit of the music was the same. I certainly wrote many of the compositions and most of the arrangements for the group – and to have one major composer and arranger for a group ensures a certain consistency of identity. The Jazztet, I think, like the Jazz Messengers, had a very identifiable sound. Arrangements are very important. An enterprising arranger can give standard tunes and classic jazz themes a whole new lease of life.

**Question:** Henceforth, the problem of the Record Companies and the music market has been an important issue, yet the Record Company “Chess” has trusted you without worrying about the profitability of the recordings. Don't you believe that this time is over now?

**Response:** Record companies have been going through a very difficult phase because of illegal file sharing, bootlegging and piracy and jazz, being a minority music (accounting for as little as 2% of total record sales in some countries) is naturally not a high priority with them. So many small jazz labels have disappeared or been acquired by the big multi-national companies.

**Question:** What were the reasons why Jazztet was disbanded ?

**Response:** The Jazztet was a transition for Mc Tyner who was going to join the John Coltrane Quartet. “Meet the Jazztet”, 1960, was the first record for Mc Coy Tyner. Did you feel that he was going to become one of the cornerstones of a new wave of Jazz with John Coltrane, Jimmy Garrison and Elvin Jones?

The Jazztet, remember, was an all-star group, which meant that its members were all leaders in their own right. So naturally, they had their own projects to work on. But between February 1960, when we recorded “Meet The Jazztet”, and February 1986, we got together a few times and recorded seven more albums. Then, in the Fall of 1996, we had a reunion with Art Farmer and Curtis Fuller, and a rhythm section consisting of Geoff Keezer, Dwayne Burno, Joe Farnsworth and special guest Jon Hendricks, for a European tour organised by Gaby Kleinschmidt and titled “Whisper Not”

As far as McCoy Tyner was concerned, I always thought he had a very bright future, though of course I could not predict the enormous success which was to follow the getting together of John Coltrane, McCoy, Jimmy Garrison and Elvin Jones.

**Question:** To what extent has the Jazztet affected your life?

**Response:** The Jazztet was an important milestone in my career, of course – but I have been blessed with many other adventures and opportunities, especially in the matter of writing arrangements for major artists, such as Diana Ross, Sammy Davis Jr., Eartha Kitt, Peggy Lee, Lou Rawls, Connie Francis, Carmen McRae, Count Basie, Miles Davis, Oscar Peterson, Dizzy Gillespie, Lionel Hampton, Benny Goodman and Ella Fitzgerald.

**Question:** When did you first meet the saxophone and music?

**Response:** I began studying piano at the age of nine and later I studied organ and clarinet: I was 14 when I switched to the tenor saxophone. Then, after attending Howard University in Washington from 1947 to 1950, I joined the band of Bull Moose Jackson – that was my first professional engagement.

**Question:** Who are the people that marked your life?

**Response:** You can say all of the people whom I have already mentioned. But Tadd Dameron, Dizzy Gillespie and Art Blakey in particular. And my early heroes on saxophone were Ben Webster and Coleman Hawkins.

**Question:** As for the choice of the musicians for this tribute. How is the contact made between the musicians?

There is a relationship between Randy Brecker and Clifford Brown or between Al Foster and Max Roach that would explain the choice of these two musicians.

**Response:** These are musicians I have long admired and worked with and the very important thing they have in common as far as this project is concerned is that they all have a profound respect for Clifford Brown.

**Question:** Who are the saxophonists that you appreciate in the new generation?

**Response:** Michael Brecker, Kenny Garrett, Joshua Redman, Branford Marsalis - to name just a few!

**Question:** Do you teach music to youngsters?

**Response:** Yes I do, when I have time in my busy schedule!

**Question:** Let's talk about your experience in the movie "The Terminal" of Steven Spielberg. You are not at your first experience, since you worked for the cinema in the 1960's after Jazztet had been disbanded?

**Response:** It was a great experience, which I very much enjoyed. And, of course, I worked in the movie business quite a lot. From 1963 onwards, I devoted an increasing amount of my time to composing and arranging and writing for television and the cinema in Europe between 1964 and 1965. When I returned to the States, I gave up playing for nine years to devote myself completely to writing movie and television music.

**Question:** A last question related to the big standard "Night In Tunisia" adopted by all generations of jazzmen. Dizzy Gillespie came to Tunisia in 1978 for the Carthage Festival. I believe that "Night In Tunisia" was created before the arrival of Dizzy Gillespie to Tunisia. Would you tell us the circumstances of the creation of this great jazz standard?

**Response:** "A Night In Tunisia" was a highly significant milestone in the evolution of jazz music, when Dizzy Gillespie fused Afro-Cuban rhythms with jazz melodies for the first time. Dizzy wrote the theme in 1941 when he was playing at Kelly's Stables with the Benny Carter group. During a break, he sat at the piano and improvised on some chord changes. As he records in his biography, "I looked at the notes of the chords I was playing and noticed that they formed a melody. All I had to do was write a bridge and put some rhythm to it. The melody had a very Latin feeling and the rhythm came out of the bebop style. Afterwards we played the tune on 52<sup>nd</sup> Street and

called it 'A Night In Tunisia' . ”