

Lionel Hampton

Background information

Birth name	Lionel Leo Hampton
Also known as	"Gates", "Hamp", "Mad Lionel"
Born	April 20, 1908
	Louisville, Kentucky, United States
Died	August 31, 2002 (aged 94)
	New York City, New York, United States
Genres	Swing, Big band, Mainstream jazz, New York blues
Occupation(s)	Multi-instrumentalist, Actor, Composer
Instruments	Vibraphone, Drums. Piano, Vocals
Years active	1927–2002

Labels

Decca

Associated acts

Benny Goodman, Teddy Wilson, Quincy Jones, Louis Armstrong, Gloria Parker

Lionel Leo Hampton (April 20, 1908 – August 31, 2002) was an American jazz vibraphonist, pianist, percussionist, bandleader and actor. Hampton worked with jazz musicians from Louis Armstrong, Benny Goodman, and Buddy Rich to Charlie Parker, Charles Mingus, and Quincy Jones. In 1992, he was inducted into the Alabama Jazz Hall of Fame, and was awarded the National Medal of Arts in 1996.

Biography

Early life

Lionel Hampton was born in Louisville, Kentucky, in 1908, and was raised by his grandmother. Shortly after he was born, he and his mother moved to her hometown Birmingham, Alabama. He spent his early childhood in Kenosha, Wisconsin, before he and his family moved to Chicago, Illinois, in 1916. As a youth, Hampton was a member of the Bud Billiken Club, an alternative to the Boy Scouts of America, which was off limits because of racial segregation. During the 1920s—while still a teenager—Hampton took xylophone lessons from Jimmy Bertrand and started playing drums. Hampton was raised Roman Catholic, and started out playing fife and drum at the Holy Rosary Academy near Chicago.

Early career

Lionel Hampton began his career playing drums for the Chicago Defender Newsboys' Band (led by Major N. Clark Smith) while still a teenager in Chicago. He moved to California in 1927 or 1928, playing drums for the Dixieland Blues-Blowers. He made his recording debut with The Quality Serenaders led by Paul Howard, then left for Culver City and drummed for the Les Hite band at Sebastian's Cotton Club. One of his trademarks as a drummer was his ability to do stunts with multiple pairs of sticks such as twirling and juggling without missing a beat. During this period he began practicing on the vibraphone. In 1930 Louis Armstrong came to California and hired the Les Hite band, asking Hampton if he would play vibes on two songs. So began his career as a vibraphonist, popularizing the use of the instrument in the process. Invented ten years earlier, the vibraphone is essentially a xylophone with metal bars, a sustain pedal, and resonators equipped with electric-powered fans that add vibrato.

While working with the Les Hite band, Hampton also occasionally did some performing with Nat Shilkret and his orchestra. During the early 1930s he studied music at the University of Southern California. In 1934 he led his own orchestra, and then appeared in the Bing Crosby film Pennies From Heaven (1936) alongside Louis Armstrong (wearing a mask in a scene while playing drums).

With Benny Goodman

As far as I'm concerned, what he did in those days—and they were hard days in 1937—made it possible for Negroes to have their chance in baseball and other fields.

Also in November 1936, the Benny Goodman Orchestra came to Los Angeles to play the Palomar Ballroom. When John Hammond brought Goodman to see Hampton perform, Goodman invited him to join his trio, which thus became the celebrated Benny Goodman Quartet with Teddy Wilson and Gene Krupa completing the lineup. The Trio and Quartet were among the first racially integrated jazz groups to perform before audiences, and were a leading small-group of the day.

Lionel Hampton Orchestra

Lionel Hampton at the Aquarium, New York, c.June 1946 (photograph: William Gottlieb)

While Hampton worked for Goodman in New York, he recorded with several different small groups known as the Lionel Hampton Orchestra, as well as assorted small groups within the Goodman band. In 1940 Hampton left the Goodman organization under amicable circumstances to form his own big band.

Hampton's orchestra became popular during the 1940s and early 1950s. His third recording with them in 1942 produced a classic version of "Flying Home", featuring a solo by Illinois Jacquet that anticipated rhythm & blues. Although Hampton first recorded "Flying Home" under his own name with a small group in 1940 for Victor, the best and most famous version is the big band version recorded for Decca on May 26, 1942 in a new arrangement by Hampton's pianist Milt Buckner. The selection became popular, and so in 1944 Hampton recorded "Flying Home, Number Two" featuring Arnett Cobb. The song went on to become the theme song for all three men. Guitarist Billy Mackel first joined Hampton in 1944, and would perform and record with him almost continuously through the late 1970s. In 1947 he performed "Stardust" at a "Just Jazz" concert for producer Gene Norman, also featuring Charlie Shavers and Slam Stewart; the recording was issued by Norman's label GNP Crescendo.

From the mid-1940s until the early 1950s, Hampton led a lively rhythm & blues band whose Decca Records recordings included numerous young performers who later achieved fame. They included bassist Charles Mingus, saxophonist Johnny Griffin, guitarist Wes Montgomery, vocalist Dinah Washington and keyboardist Milt Buckner. Other noteworthy band members were trumpeters Dizzy Gillespie, Cat Anderson, Kenny Dorham, and Snooky Young; trombonist Jimmy Cleveland, and saxophonists Illinois Jacquet and Jerome Richardson.

The Hampton orchestra that toured Europe in 1953 included Clifford Brown, Gigi Gryce, Anthony Ortega, Monk Montgomery, George Wallington, Art Farmer, Quincy Jones, and singer Annie Ross. Hampton continued to record with small groups and jam sessions during the 1940s and 1950s, with Oscar Peterson, Buddy DeFranco, and others. In 1955, while in California working on *The Benny Goodman Story* he recorded with Stan Getz and made two albums with Art Tatum for Norman Granz as well as with his own big band.

Hampton performed with Louis Armstrong and Italian singer Lara Saint Paul at the 1968 Sanremo Music Festival in Italy. The performance created a sensation with Italian audiences, as it broke into a real jazz session. That same year, Hampton received a Papal Medal from Pope Paul VI.

Later career

Lionel Hampton during a concert in Aachen (Germany) on May 19, 1977

During the 1960s, Hampton's groups were in decline; he was still performing what had succeeded for him earlier in his career. He did not fare much better in the 1970s, though he recorded actively for his Who's Who in Jazz record label, which he founded in 1977/1978.

Beginning in February 1984, Hampton and his band played at the University of Idaho's annual jazz festival, which was renamed the Lionel Hampton Jazz Festival the following year. In 1987 the UI's school of music was renamed for Hampton, the first university music school named for a jazz musician.

Hampton remained active until a stroke in Paris in 1991 led to a collapse on stage. That incident, combined with years of chronic arthritis, forced him to cut back drastically on performances. However, he did play at the Smithsonian National Museum of American History in 2001 shortly before his death.

Lionel Hampton died from congestive heart failure at Mount Sinai Hospital, New York City, on 31 August 2002. He was interred at the Woodlawn Cemetery, Bronx, New York. His funeral was held on September 7, 2002 and featured a performance by Wynton Marsalis and David Ostwald's Gully Low Jazz Band at Riverside Church in Manhattan; the procession began at The Cotton Club in Harlem.

Personal life

On November 11, 1936, in Yuma, Arizona, Lionel Hampton married Gladys Riddle (c. 1910-1971). Gladys was Lionel's business manager throughout much of his career. Many musicians recall that Lionel ran the music and Gladys ran the business.

During the 1950s he had a strong interest in Judaism and raised money for Israel. In 1953 he composed a King David suite and performed it in Israel with the Boston Pops Orchestra. Later in life Hampton became a Christian Scientist. Hampton was a Thirty-third degree Prince Hall freemason in New York, also. In January 1997, his apartment caught fire and destroyed his awards and belongings; Hampton escaped uninjured.

President George W. Bush honors Lionel Hampton during a ceremony recognizing Black Music Month in the East Room of the White House on June 30, 2001.

Charity

Hampton was deeply involved in the construction of various public housing projects, and founded the Lionel Hampton Development Corporation. Construction began with the Lionel Hampton Houses in Harlem, New York in the 1960s, with the help of then Republican governor Nelson Rockefeller. Hampton's wife, Gladys Hampton, also was involved in construction of a housing project in her name, the Gladys Hampton Houses. Gladys died in 1971. In the 1980s, Hampton built another housing project called Hampton Hills in Newark, New Jersey.

Hampton was a staunch Republican and served as a delegate to several Republican National Conventions. He served as Vice-Chairman of the New York Republican County Committee for some years and also was a member of the New York City Human Rights Commission. Hampton donated almost \$300,000 to Republican campaigns and committees throughout his lifetime.

Awards

2001 - Harlem Jazz and Music Festival's Legend Award

1996 - International Jazz Hall of Fame Induction and Award (performed "Flying Home" with Illinois Jacquet and Count Basis Orchestra)

1996 - National Medal of Arts presented by President Bill Clinton

1995 - Honorary Commissioner of Civil Rights by George Pataki

1995 - Honorary Doctorate from the New England Conservatory of Music

1993 - Honorary Doctorate from the University of Maryland Eastern Shore

1992 - Inducted into the Alabama Jazz Hall of Fame

1992 - "Contributions To The Cultural Life of the Nation" award from John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts

1988 - The National Endowment for the Arts Jazz Masters Fellowship

1988 - The National Association of Jazz Educators Hall of Fame Award

1987 - Honorary Doctorate of Humanities from the University of Idaho - UI's School of Music renamed "Lionel Hampton School of Music."

1987 - The Roy Wilkins Memorial Award from the NAACP

1986 - The "One of a Kind" Award from Broadcast Music, Inc.

1984 - Jazz Hall of Fame Award from the Institute of Jazz Studies

1984 - Honorary Doctorate of Music from USC

1983 - The International Film and Television Festival of New York City Award

1983 - Honorary Doctorate of Humane Letters from the State University of New York

1982 - Hollywood Walk of Fame Star

1981 - Honorary Doctorate of Humanities from Glassboro State College

1979 - Honorary Doctorate of Music from Howard University

1978 - Bronze Medallion from New York City

1976 - Honorary Doctorate of Humanities from Daniel Hale Williams University

1975 - Honorary Doctorate of Music from Xavier University of Louisiana

1974 - Honorary Doctorate of Fine Arts from Pepperdine University

1968 - Papal Medal from Pope Paul VI

1966 - George Frideric Handel Medal

1957 - American Goodwill Ambassador by President Dwight D. Eisenhower

1954 - Israel's Statehood Award

Discography

Year	Album	Notes	Label
1937–39	Benny Goodman -The Complete		RCA Records
	RCA Victor Small Group Recordings	along with Teddy Wilson, appearing as sideman with Benny Goodman	
1937–39	Hot Mallets, Vol. 1	appearances by Cootie Williams, Johnny Hodges, Harry James, Benny Carter, Chu Berry, Rex Stewart, Dizzy Gillespie, Coleman Hawkins, Ben Webster, Charlie Christian	Bluebird Records
1937–39	The Jumpin Jive, Vol. 2		Bluebird Records
1938	The Famous 1938 Carnegie Hall		Columbia Records
	Jazz Concert	appearance as sideman for Benny	

		Goodman	
1939–40	Tempo and Swing	appearances by Ben Webster, Coleman Hawkins, Nat "King" Cole and Helen Forrest	Bluebird Records
1944	Star Dust	the famous "Just Jazz" jam session	Verve Records
1947	with the Just Jazz All Stars	Charlie Shavers, Willie Smith, Corky Corcoran, Milt Buckner, Slam Stewart, Jackie Mills, Lee Young	GNP Crescendo/Vogue 78s/London Records 1972 transfer
1953–54	The Lionel Hampton Quintet	with DeFranco and Peterson. Includes a 17-minute jam on "Flyin Home". There is also a 5CD box of the complete Verve recordings of the quartets and quintets with Peterson, as well as a number of other	Verve Records

compilations and selections.

1955	Hamp and Getz		Verve Records
1958	Golden Vibes	with a reed quintet	Columbia Records
1958	Lionel		Audio Fidelity
1960	Silver Vibes	with a Trombones And Rhythms (Trombone Quartet)	Columbia Records
1963	Benny Goodman Together Again!	reunion with Lionel Hampton, Teddy Wilson & Gene Krupa	Columbia Records
1963	You Better Know It!!!	with Clark Terry, Ben Webster, Hank Jones, Milt Hinton, Osie Johnson	Impulse! Records
1972	Please Sunrise		Brunswick Record Corporation
1979	Live In Emmen/Holland		Timeless Muse
1988	Mostly Blues		Jazz Heritage Society
1991	Live at the Blue Note	jamming with old friends including	

1995 For the Love of Music

trombonist Al Grey

Columbia Records

featuring Norman Brown, Ron Carter,

Roy Haynes, Chaka Khan, Tito Puente,

Joshua Redman, Dianne Reeves,

Wallace Roney, Patrice Rushen,

Grover Washington Jr., and

Stevie Wonder

Motown Company

Compilations

Year	Album	Notes	Label
37–40	Swing Classics - Lionel Hampton and His Jazz Groups	Recordings from 1937-1940 Reissued 1961	RCA Victor LPM-2318
42–45	Steppin' Out - Lionel Hampton and Orchestra	Recordings from 1942-1945 Reissued 1980	Decca Jazz Heritage Series DL-79244
39–56	Greatest Hits	Selections from above records	RCA Victor
42–63	Hamp! -		GRP/Decca
37–63	The Lionel Hampton Story	Selections from all records and eras above	Proper

Filmography

Year	Movie	Role	Director	Genre
1933	Girl Without A Room	himself	Ralph Murphy	Comedy
1936	Pennies From Heaven	himself	Norman Z. McLeod	Comedy/Musical
1937	Hollywood Hotel	himself	Busby Berkeley	Musical/Romance
1938	For Auld Lang Syne	himself ?		Documentary
1948	A Song Is Born	himself	Howard Hawks	Comedy/Musical
1949	Lionel Hampton and His Orchestra	himself	Will Cowan	Music
1955	Musik, Musik and nur Musik	himself	Ernst Matray	Comedy
1955	The Benny Goodman Story	himself	Valentine Davies	Drama
1957	Mister Rock and Roll	himself	Charles S. Dubin	Drama/Musical
1980	But Then She's Betty Carter	himself	Michelle Parkerson	Documentary