

# Obituary-International Trumpeter's Guild

**Gordon Claude "Chris" Griffin** was born in Binghamton, New York (NY) on Oct. 31, 1915 and took up the trumpet at age 12 after his family moved to White Plains, NY. By the age of 19 Chris was playing with the Charlie Barnet band sitting next to fellow trumpeters (and band arrangers) Tutti Camarata and Eddie Sauter.

Chris went on to take Bunny Berigan's place as first trumpet at CBS radio in NY, but left that position to join the Benny Goodman Orchestra in 1936. In 1938 this band would play the historic first jazz concert at Carnegie Hall, featuring Gene Krupa, Lionel Hampton, Teddy Wilson and a trumpet section comprised of Griffin, Harry James, and Ziggy Elman. Duke Ellington was quoted as saying that it was "the greatest trumpet section that ever was." Glenn Miller called it "the marvel of the age." While Harry and Ziggy were the flamboyant soloists, Chris was happy to play most of the lead and play an occasional solo (the flip side of the 78 disc of Goodman's theme song Let's Dance features Chris playing *Boy Meets Horn*). The band also appeared in films like "Hollywood Hotel" and "The Big Broadcast of 1938".

At the end of 1939 Chris left Goodman to go back to CBS, where he was a regularly featured soloist on radio shows like Evening In Paris, Your Hit Parade, and The Toast of The Town. He was also recording with just about every popular singer of the day including Ella Fitzgerald, Billie Holiday, Mel Tormé, and Frank Sinatra. He can be heard on the classic jazz recording "Charlie Parker with Strings".

In the early 1950s Chris went to Hollywood to play on the soundtrack for "The Benny Goodman Story". Conrad Gozzo was in the trumpet section and Chris told me he was a bit overwhelmed when Benny told him to play all of the lead. Out of respect to this great Hollywood lead player, Chris said he "quietly passed 'Goz' a few lead parts".

During the 1950s Chris was also playing on television. One of his greatest achievements had to be creating and playing the beautiful trumpet obbligato on the theme for the Jackie Gleason Show. Chris' lead trumpet could be heard on the entire run of the Ed Sullivan show where he worked with section mates Bernie Privin, Thad Jones, and Jimmy Nottingham. Chris' son Paul often played next to, or subbed for, his dad.

In later years Chris ran a music store/trumpet school in New Jersey with former Goodman band mate Pee Wee Erwin. He toured the world and played with big bands, in addition to making appearances as a leader fronting small jazz groups.

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Chris Griffin was a modest, quick witted, generous, loving man who was a pioneer of what we now know as the modern music business. He fell ill in February of 2005, was eventually diagnosed with a tumor resulting from melanoma, and died on June 18, 2005.

Chris's biography, "Sittin' In With Chris Griffin", Scarecrow Press, was released a few weeks prior to his death. Written by Warren Vaché, Sr., the book contains many of Chris' favorite anecdotes and stories, told in his own words.

Chris Griffin is survived by five children, seven grandchildren, and four great grandchildren. He will be missed by the hundreds of friends, family and colleagues who loved, admired, and were inspired by him.