

SUNDAY STANDARD - Sunday February 22, 1987

## Benny Goodman — an appreciation

ON January 22, Roy Goodman died in London after an operation. Christened Roy, he has been known as "Benny" Goodman by his many friends and colleagues throughout his long residence in Kenya.

Benny was a remarkable man by any standards.

He was born in 1929 in Chatham, Kent where his father was serving in the regular British Army. He had many homes in the south of England moving to wherever his father was posted. During his school days and as a young man he was already showing a marked aptitude for work in the electrical field, a skill which he developed throughout his adult life.

Following in his father's footsteps he joined the British Army in 1948 at the age of 19. As a soldier, he found himself in Kenya in 1950 and has lived here ever since.

From his arrival Benny became keenly interested in theatre and his extraordinary talents were immediately apparent in numerous ways as director, actor, singer, designer, stage manager and technician. He worked for a number of groups in various venues, including the old Garrison Theatre, before the Kenya National Theatre opened in 1952.

He was, above all, as an actor, an extremely successful comedian. My first fond memory of him was at a Charity Fete in Nairobi in the 1950s. Benny and his companion were dressed as clowns and they drove into the arena in an old "banger". There was an explosion the bonnet blew off and both the doors, the two clowns were thrown out performing forward rolls, and the performance began. The actor, Benny, was a clown, a sad-faced one, who could keep an audience hilariously enter-



The late Benny Goodman

tained for hours.

By 1955, Benny had made a decision to remain in Kenya. He took local discharge from the Army and joined the East African Posts and Telegraphs organisation, beginning work in the Personnel Department. He served the Post Office from 1955 to 1968 and throughout this time was a most valuable member of that body, highly regarded by his colleagues.

Shortly after Benny joined the Post Office, he met his wife Brenda, who was also working in the Personnel Branch and they were married. At just about the same time the acting group Nairobi City Players was formed. Benny became a founder member and was Stage Director of its first production *The Love of Four Colonels* in November, 1956.

Needless to say, Brenda also worked on the production. From then onwards, most of Benny's work in the theatre was for Nairobi City Players and Brenda, and later their two children Gail and Glen were invariably found involved in NCP productions.

Benny had a rare acquisitive mind, thirsting for knowledge.

Any problem had to be faced and solved.

In 1968, towards the end of his career with the Post Office, Benny became extremely interested in computerisation. He went to ICL and borrowed a manual, and read it — overnight. The following morning, he went back and asked them if they had anything else.

Not convinced that he had absorbed the first manual, ICL nevertheless gave him text books covering the next and subsequent stages and, in no time at all, he taught himself computer programming. His extraordinarily clear and logical mind was working overtime and he was thoroughly enjoying it. With his newly acquired skill, he started to freelance with the E.A. Railways & Harbours and the E.A. Breweries. He had plenty of work.

Tony Eve, who was to become a colleague in The Data Centre then retained him for his computer programmes for the Cooper Motor Corporation. In March, 1973 it was Benny's idea that The Data Centre be formed as a fully owned subsidiary of C.M.C.

In 1975 The Data Centre set up on its own with Benny Goodman as a director, shareholder and very much an innovator inspiring all its activities. For good reasons he became highly

respected in the computer field and his services were much in demand, backed by the resources of The Data Centre, which went from strength to strength.

If anybody had a computer problem in Nairobi, they contacted Benny who either provided a definitive answer or a last resort solution. He had found his metier, and thrived on it for years working long hours and with great enthusiasm on computer programmes for many leading organisations in Nairobi.

Benny loved Kenya, its scenery, its people and its wildlife, and he was extremely knowledgeable about the land we live in. He would often find time, out of his amazingly busy life, to take a visitor on a conducted tour of some parts of Kenya. With his computer mind he memorised a commentary describing various landmarks, historical events, geographical and geological details to fit in to specific mileometer makings along the route.

Throughout the time he lived in Nairobi, Benny's prodigious talents made an enormous contribution to Theatre in this country. Few people can fail to remember with keen pleasure some of his outstanding performances.

My own favourites are "The Cowardly Lion".

B.E.