

December, 2007

**MEL MARTIN/
BENNY CARTER QUINTET**

Just Friends (Jazzed Media)



VARIOUS ARTISTS

The Benny Carter Centennial Project

(Evening Star)



Benny Carter died in the summer of 2003, just over four years before his centennial anniversary. During his long life, the protean Carter recorded in nine different decades on a half-dozen different instruments, led big bands in America and Europe, was an African-American pioneer in the Hollywood film and TV music fields, and produced significant extended compositions for jazz orchestras into the 1980s and 1990s. As a player, he was best known for his distinctive alto saxophone style (the only major alternative to the Johnny Hodges style in the pre-bop years), although he was also a formidable trumpet and clarinet player during the swing era. As an arranger he helped codify and define big-band jazz writing, especially for reeds, and his large body of memorable work makes him one of the music's premier composers.

Carter was 86 when he joined tenor saxophonist-flutist Mel Martin in April 1994 for a gig at Yoshi's that yielded the live tracks on *Just Friends*. Heard on four of the six total tracks, Carter's alto sax is as suave, tart, swinging and inventive as it was before he became a senior citizen. He and Martin romp through "Perdido," trade crisp fours on the title tune, and blend lead and obligato lines on "Secret Love." Carter is mesmerizing in his deeply blues-tinged solo on his evocative "Elegy in Blue." Martin's flute and Roger Kellaway's piano reinforce the case for Carter's "People Time" as an indelible jazz standard.

George Kanzler