



BIG BAND *Alliance*

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WARREN COVINGTON



given name Warren Lewis Covington

birthdate Aug 7, 1921

birthplace Philadelphia, PA

father Lewis W. Covington, b.May 5

education Darby High School, Philadelphia, PA

musical education studied trombone in a suburb of Philadelphia, PA; composition with Danny Hurd at New York University, New York City, NY; voice with Dr. Stetson Humphrey in Hollywood, CA

military service US Coast Guard (1943-45) incl "Tars and Spars" show

membership ASCAP (1956-)

residence 1939 Valentines Rd, Westbury, NY (late 1950s); 151 Fox Hollow Rd, Wyckoff, NJ (1960s); 11223 Pocket Book Dr, Tampa, FL (1990s)

first wife Florence Deans "Terree" Covington, m.1941, div.1960, d.1995

son Donald Warren "Don" Covington, b.May 5, 1943

son Dennis Covington, b.Oct 12, 1951

son Dave Covington, b.Aug 4, 1953

second wife Beverly "Kathee" Covington, a singer, b.1944?, m.1960 or 1961

son Chris W. Covington, b.Dec 11, 1962?

daughter Cathee R. Covington Nochimson, b.Apr 20, 1960, d.

daughter Shaunda Covington, b.Jul 7, 1967?

third wife Sylvia, a retired ballet dancer, m.Dec 19, 1990

death date Aug 24, 1999



“For You, Mr. Covington”

He gets credited most often as director of The Tommy Dorsey Orchestra, which he led from 1958-61, the period when it recorded a top 10 dance favorite, Tea for Two Cha Cha.

But Warren Covington’s musical achievements span several decades before and after that, so Christopher was proud to introduce him when he played a one-nighter at the Palace Theater in Canton, Ohio in May 1986.

“I mean, this is my life,” he told Christopher, “and I treat every performance as if it was for the worldwide television. ‘Cause I love it. I’m very fussy, I like class, I like a classy band, I like a classy act, and I like it diversified.”

His career certainly was varied, starting off as a sidemen with Isham Jones in 1939, then Mitchell Ayres the following year, and Horace Heidt after that.

Christopher asked Covington when he first got the desire to lead his own big band.

“Well, the germ of that had been put into my head by Horace Heidt,” he replied. “In ‘41-’42-’43, I was with Heidt and he wanted to get and own three places. He wanted to get and set me up with a band, Frankie Carle and a band, and him. He did buy the Casino Gardens down in Santa Monica, he wanted to buy the Graystone Manor in Detroit, and he wanted to buy the Glen Island Casino [in New Rochelle, New York], which was owned by the state. And he was gonna have the bands, each one of us, and we would rotate—it was a marvelous idea! And then do the road work and get the benefit of the radio broadcasts. We would broadcast from there.”

“But then,” according to Covington, “there was an ASCAP-BMI fight and that meant no recordings, so I never recorded with him. And it’s too bad for me because everybody had made it before the war—and I did in a way, but I didn’t have records like them. But as soon as I came out [of the service], I did. So then I thought of it at that time, but then I had forgotten about it.”

He resumed work as a sideman, with Les Brown, starting in November 1945 for five or six months, followed by a brief period with Gene Krupa.



recordings as a sideman—select list:

You Won't Be Satisfied (Until You Break My Heart)

Doris Day, vocal, with Les Brown and his Orchestra, Columbia, 1945

The Frim Fram Sauce

Butch Stone, vocal, with Les Brown and his Orchestra, Columbia, 1946

Lover's Leap

Les Brown and his Orchestra, Columbia, 1946

How High the Moon

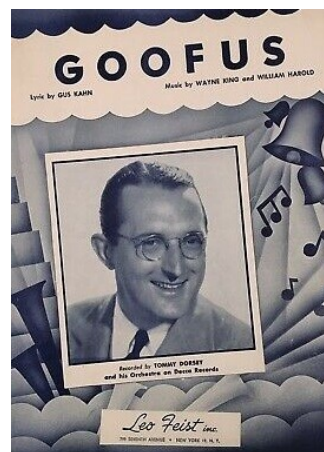
Gene Krupa and his Orchestra, Columbia, 1946

Cuddle Up a Little Closer

Warren Covington, vocal and trombone, with Ray Bloch and His Orchestra, Signature, 1947

Still, he did not yet form his own group.

"My life went into a different direction," he explained to Christopher. "I went into the studios in New York for ten years, and then I got restless and that's when I started to think again, in '56-'57, about getting a band."



He was on the staff at CBS and had a full schedule of recording dates (including a pair of disc sessions with Tommy Dorsey in September 1950, including *Goofus* . Yet studio work, while stable and lucrative, can sometimes become a trap for musicians who want a more adventurous musical diet.

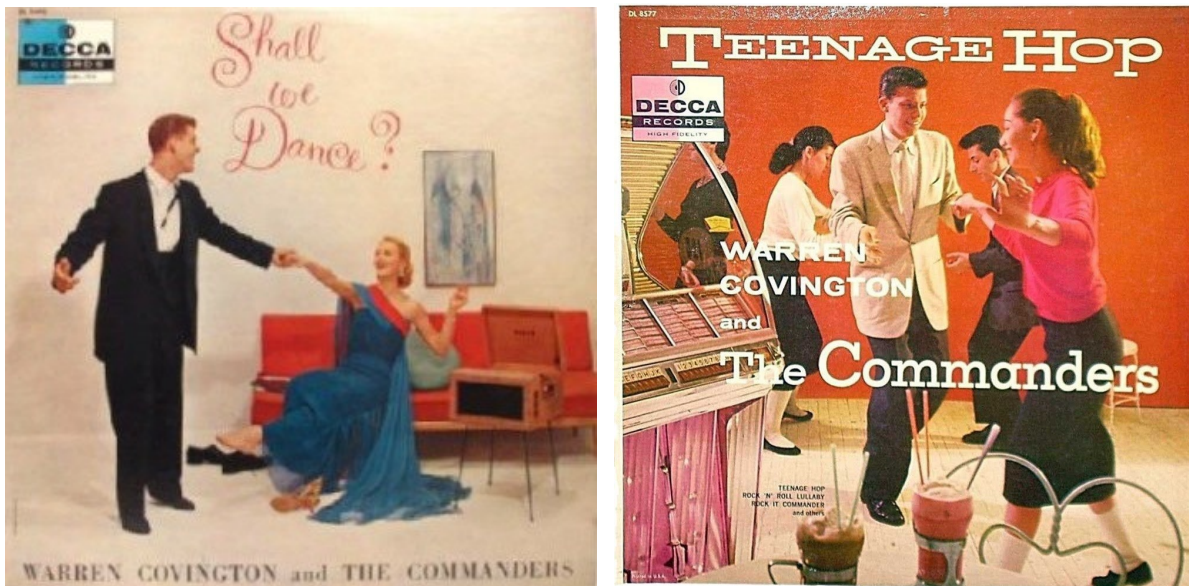
Still, Covington did not yet form his own group.



Trombonist Warren Covington (and trumpeter Chris Griffin, back left).
Photo by Jerry Saltzberg & Associates, New York City.

“My life went into a different direction,” he explained to Christopher. “I went into the studios in New York for ten years, and then I got restless and that’s when I started to think again, in ‘56-’57, about getting a band.

With the assistance of the Willard Alexander booking agency in New York City, Covington was signed as leader of The Commanders, a recording group on Decca.



Two Decca albums by Warren Covington and The Commanders, 1956-57.
Courtesy of the Universal Music Group.

“While I was doing that, Tommy died, and the estate contacted me through Willard, and that’s when I decided to make the transition,” he remembered.

Covington was selected as front man for a new Tommy Dorsey orchestra, and hit the road with the band in February 1958.



Publicity portrait by James J. Kriegsmann, New York City.

Christopher asked him who decided to make *Tea for Two* into a cha-cha. “That was my idea,” he smiled. “I got it from what they call in New York ‘club date bands.’ and they were doing that. But the cha-cha hadn’t quite broken through. So I mentioned it to my producer, who also liked Latin music. I love Latin music. And so we did it, and boy it just took off. Decca didn’t even know they had a hit. And it broke in New York, which was unheard of—they always come out here, to break records in. Akron was always one of the big towns, Akron-Canton, to try out records and see how the response is.”

Covington led the Tommy Dorsey band for 3-1/2 years, through September 1961.

However, even before his contract was up, he began hoping for a less-hectic pace.

“I just couldn’t take that 6-7 nights a week anymore, it just seemed like a blind alley,” he commented. “It was just too hard on me. So I gave the [Dorsey] estate a year’s notice, and then I continued on as Warren Covington and orchestra, which I really have been doing ever since.”



Two 12" 33 rpm LPs that are in
The Popa Family Collection

A few years after making some very appealing Dorsey-style recordings of recent pop songs for Reader's Digest in 1969, he applied to the U.S. Patent Office for rights to the names "The Pied Pipers" and "The Clambake 7." He used those trademarks to play in tribute to Tommy, including a 22-day tour to the United Kingdom in 1974, featuring Dorsey alumni Sy Oliver, Skeets Herfurt, Johnny Mince, and Pee Wee Erwin.



Publicity portraits of Warren Covington's second wife, Kathee,
by James J. Kriegsmann, New York City.

He also appeared on a PBS-TV fundraiser, “Big Band Bash,” taped in New York City in 1978, and at one of President Ronald Reagan’s inaugural balls in Washington, D.C. in January 1985.



Warren Covington [in black tuxedo], with The Pied Pipers
(l. to r., Art Lambert, Jeff Meyer, Jerry Graff), and Lynn Roberts

“Each person, you start following somebody and then the ‘you’ comes out,” he said to Christopher. “And you start to do things a little differently because I’m not the same I’m not a fingerprint like Tommy,” as he put it, “and it wasn’t necessary that I emulate the clipiness that he went from tone to tone or the sharpness, nobody knew that, it’s the melody that they know and I play. But I did learn, and still do, the tone projection. ‘Cause when I play, I play to the far wall and the tone comes out. I don’t have to play loud, but it projects and I learned that from listening to him, and I still do that.”

Yet other times, like on recordings with everyone from crooner Perry Como (such as *It’s Impossible*, recorded in 1970, with fellow trombonist Buddy Morrow sitting next to him) to the Allman Brothers rock band and movie soundtracks including “The Godfather,” Covington was his own man—classy and diversified, exactly the way he liked it.



Warren Corington
Thank You, -



Warren Covington [r., front] and his children at his Wyckoff, NJ home, ca.1970
 [l. to r.] Don, Chris, Dave, Shaunda, Cathee, Dennis.
 Photo courtesy of Liz Covington.

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Elizabeth Covington. E-mail to Christopher Popa, March 7, 2010.

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Leonard Feather. The Encyclopedia of Jazz (New York City: Horizon Press, 1960), pp.170-171.

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Christopher Popa. Interview with Warren Covington, May 15, 1986.