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The Glenn Miller Years V

Billy May said, "Glenn was a *terrible* drunk. When he'd go on the wagon, he'd be one of those stiff people. He never learned to be a decent sober man. I know other people with the same personality. When I drank and I'd stop, I'd grit my teeth, and say, 'I'll stay sober, god damn it!' And then when you'd let go, you went crazy.

"Chummy MacGregor was the first guy that told me about D.T. s. He'd wake up in the morning in New York and there was nothing to drink, so he'd have to get down to Plunkett's speakeasy. That was the only place you could get it. He'd run down and get a cab. When he tried to get in, the back seat would be full of lions and tigers, and he would have to run down to Plunkett's on the street. Chummy had been dry for six or seven years when Glenn started the band. And I know a couple of times Glenn was drunk when we were working a theater somewhere. And he was staggering, emceeing a show, and Chummy didn't let him up. Every time he'd come near Chummy, Chummy would say, 'Whatsa matter, someone hit you with the bar rag, for Chris'sake?'

"The rest of the time Glenn was kind of mad at the world. He was bitter about everything. Kind of a down kind of guy. Putting things down all the time." Billy affected a grousing snarl: 'Ah for Chris'sake, Dorsey did that.'

Broadcaster Fred Hall asked Billy: "What took you to the Miller band, money?"

Billy said: "What else? I enjoyed working for Charlie Barnet, and I wasn't really a fan of the Miller band. A guy by the name of Miles Rinker worked for the Shribman agency, the bookers in New England, and he offered me the job with Glenn." Al Rinker was, along with Bing Crosby, one of the original Rhythm Boys who sang with Paul Whiteman. Their sister was Mildred Bailey.

"Years later, after the war," Billy continued, "I ran into Miles' brother Al, who said, 'Didn't you know why Glenn offered you the job? It wasn't your trumpet playing. He knew you were writing all the Barnet charts and a lot of the originals that were catching on with the public. Charlie's band was coming up on records. He figured that if he got you in the band playing trumpet, it would torpedo Charlie's band."

This attitude to Barnet is interesting. The bandleaders of that period seemed to be on cordial terms, the glaring exception being Artie Shaw, and in some of the cases they were friends. *Down Beat* magazine may have divided the bands into two classes, hip (or, in those days, hep) and corny, and encouraged its readers to be hostile to the latter. Woody Herman was on good terms with Les Brown, and Glenn was friends with Benny Goodman and Woody Herman and indeed with Sammy Kaye, who was relegated by the trade press to the cornball category. When Glenn was overseas with his Army Air Corps band, he counted on Sammy Kaye to write him letters keeping him apprised of affairs in the business at home. Why then this hostility to Barnet?

One may surmise several factors, not the least among them Barnet's dissolute life and serial polygamy. By all evidence and testimony, Glenn was faithful to Helen throughout their relationship, and he was obviously something of a puritan. Another factor may have been Barnet's wealth: he didn't have to make money from his band; Glenn did, and his struggles in the early days were hard.

Billy May would write for Miller *Ida, Delilah, Long Tall Mama, Take the "A" Train, Always in My Heart, Blues in the Night*. He said, "Interestingly enough, Glenn Miller was offered *Blues in the Night* before anybody else and he turned it down because he said the format wasn't the conventional AABA song. He said, 'That'll never be a hit.' We had to end up doing *Blues in the Night* of course, and I did the arrangement. Miller was bright, and he said, 'That's one I really blew.'

"I was playing more than I was arranging. We worked hard in the band. It was a lucrative job, but Miller already had two great arrangers, Jerry Gray and Bill Finegan.

"It was quite a come-down to go from the freedom of Charlie's band, where it was so loose, to go with the regimented Miller band. I mean, we even had to wear the same colored socks! With Charlie, we had two uniforms, a blue and brown. They'd tell us, 'Wear the blue suit tomorrow,' and so we all came with the blue suit except Bus Etri, the

guitar player, who wore the brown suit. Now that would have been a big disaster in the Miller band. Charlie made a big joke of it and we all had a big laugh. We presented Bus as a soloist that night."

Some of the musicians said Glenn was "chicken-shit" or "square." Louis Mucci said, "He was almost militaristic. But he got a lot of good results . . . . I stayed with the band seven or eight months. It was very good. I liked him."

Al Klink said of Miller: "About my personal relationship with him, he kind of left me alone and I left him alone. And I think we both liked it that way. I was always trying to do my best, to come on time and all that. I existed there.

"Glenn was a totally different kind of guy as compared to Benny Goodman. He was difficult to influence about anything, including musicians. Some guys were fairly close to Glenn but it seems to me that Glenn never had friends who were on the same level with him. Although I guess Chalmers MacGregor was. They were old buddies. Glenn was aloof.

After I'd left the band and joined Benny, we were on a train and I was going through the dining car. I passed where Benny was sitting without speaking, because that's the way you did it in the Miller band. He didn't want to know about the guys and didn't bother. Benny said, 'Hey, kid, come on over and sit down.' I was amazed at all this because Glenn never asked anybody to be friendly.'"

Klink spoke of his vivid memories of the time Hal McIntyre left the band.

The "swing era" was expanding with a growing need for bands for the hundreds of dance pavilions and ballrooms that had sprung up throughout the country. Seeing this clearly, Benny Goodman backed Harry James in starting a band, expanding the franchise as it were. Claude Thornhill and Charlie Spivak wanted to start their own bands. But they didn't go to Artie Shaw, now drowning in money after the success of his recording of *Begin the Beguine* for help. They went to Glenn when he became a success, and he backed them both: he owned pieces of those two bands. And he promised to back Hal McIntyre and Tex Beneke in starting bands.

One day he called McIntyre aside. He said:

"You're fired. You start rehearsing your own band in two weeks at Haven's."

Miller was particularly hard on Bill Finegan, one of the greatest arrangers jazz — and American dance music generally — has ever known.

If it was indeed an era of great bands, it was also an era of great arrangers. Miller was correct in his assessment that it was a particular and recognizable *sound* that brought popularity to a band. And the arrangers were substantially responsible for the sound of each band: Gene Gifford with Glen Gray, Fletcher Henderson and later Mel Powell and Eddie Sauter with Benny Goodman, Neal Hefti and Ralph Burns with Woody Herman, Sy Oliver with Jimmie Lunceford and then Paul Weston and Sy Oliver with Tommy Dorsey, Bill Borden and Gil Evans and later Gerry Mulligan with Claude Thornhill in one of the bands that Glenn backed, George Duning with Kay Kyser, Frank Comstock with Les Brown, each of them strongly identified with the band he wrote for. And Miller had, as well as Billy May, Jerry Gray, and Bill Finegan.

The first three sides for Bluebird, as we have noted, were arranged by Glenn: *My Reverie, By the Waters of the Minnetonka*, and *King Porter Stomp*, recorded August 27, 1938. The next session, February 6, 1939, produced four sides, *(Gotta Get Some) Shut-eye, How I'd Like to Be with You in Bermuda, Cuckoo in the Clock*, and *Romance Runs in the Family*, all of them trivial songs, and *Bermuda* an egregious example of the kind of utter crap that was the norm for that era. The great songs of the period came mostly from Broadway musicals and the movies, but the run of what you heard on juke boxes was of the caliber of the appallingly cute *Three Little Fishes*, which Miller in fact recorded on the third Bluebird session on April 4, 1939. The three Miller arrangements for the first Bluebird session are competent and conventional. The four songs on the second session, as bad as they are, have arrangements by Finegan, and they are far superior to Miller's, fresh and imaginative, leaving one to wonder what they were like before Miller got his hands on them. Marion Evans, a superb arranger who wrote for the post-war Miller band, examined them in Miller's New York office, and was fascinated by how good they were "before Miller fucked them up."

The third Bluebird session, April 4, 1939, contained Finegan charts on Frankie Carle's *Sunrise Serenade* and on *Little Brown Jug*, which dates from 1869. The latter would be one of Miller's biggest and most enduring hits. And on the next session, two weeks later, two Finegan arrangements were recorded, including one on Morton Gould's *Pavanne*.

Eddie Sauter, with whom Finegan would later team, experienced the same kind of interference from Benny Goodman.

Don Redman, who wrote for McKinney's Cotton Pickers in the 1920s, was a schooled musician, Lunceford was a schooled musician. Bix Beiderbecke was listening to Stravinsky, Debussy, and Dukas. William Grant Still was studying with Varèse by 1927. The harmony in dance bands became more adventurous through the 1930s until you got Boyd Raeburn in the 1940s.

I once had a conversation about this with Mel Powell, who wrote for Goodman and later for the Miller Air Force band. I said, "I can't believe that the arrangers were not aware of all that was going on with the extension of harmony in European music. Bill Challis was starting to use some of that stuff when he was writing for Goldkette. Is there an answer to this question: were the writers waiting for the public to catch up?"

"I think I'll surprise you," Mel said. "They were waiting for the bandleaders to catch up. The bandleaders were much more aware of what a negotiable commodity was. When an arrangement would be brought in and rejected because 'That's too fancy,' that was a signal that I was no longer welcome. So I meant exactly what I said. If the arrangers were waiting for anything, they were waiting for the bandleaders."

I said, "Okay. Given Benny Goodman's inherent conservatism, I am surprised that he welcomed what you wrote. Because some of it was very radical. *Mission to Moscow* is radical for the period."

"Yeah. It gets close to peril," Mel said. "I thought that Eddie Sauter brought in some of the most inventive, imaginative things. Eddie was really devoted less to composition than he was to arranging, in the best, deepest sense of 'ranging'. I can recall rehearsals when Eddie would bring music to us, and it would be rejected. A lot was lost. On some pieces that we do know—for example his arrangement for *You Stepped Out of a Dream*, which I always regarded as a really advanced, marvelous kind of thing — Benny would *thin it out*. And sometimes take the credit for it being a hit, getting it past the a&r men. I don't think the thinning out was an improvement. Quite the contrary. I think that Eddie, and I to a lesser degree, were exploring harmonic worlds that ought to have been encouraged, rather than set aside."

Thus, over in the band led by Miller's friend Goodman, Sauter was enduring the same kind of interference that Finegan was with Miller.

Since Finegan was born in Newark, New Jersey, on May 3, 1917, he was twenty-two when he became a major and prolific part of the Miller team. His parents and sisters all played piano, and inevitably so did he. He studied music privately and later at the Paris Conservatory. A shy, soft-spoken, and self-effacing man, on May 4, 1997, he did a radio interview with Fred Hall. Fred began in broadcasting as an engineer who did many remote broadcasts with the great big bands, then during World War II, he did programs for the troops in the South Pacific. He was an astute scholar of the big-band era. Finegan told Fred:

"I went to a school down in a small town named Rumson, New Jersey. We had a very good music department. Good teachers. And there was a lot of interest in music. School band, the whole scene. I got together with some other guys and we formed a band, like, a jazz band."

"We found out that stock arrangements sounded terrible. We had three trumpets, three saxophones, and rhythm. We didn't have any trombones. The stock arrangements sounded so bad I started writing some stuff for the band, more tailored for it." Stock arrangements were sold by music publishers to the bands both large and small that were all over America.

"I studied harmony and counterpoint. I had that as a teenager. I started early, and I wrote simple riff-type arrangements. That's really how I got started. One thing led to another — out of necessity, I think."

Fred asked him: "You studied in Paris for a while, didn't you?"

"Yeah."

"And at that point, did you not know where you were going in music for sure? You just wanted to get a better technical background."

"Yeah. I just followed my nose."

"Who did you listen to among the other arrangers? Fletcher Henderson? Gene Gifford?"

"Yeah. I used to listen to *Camel Caravan* on the radio with the Casa Loma band every night. And Fletcher Henderson. Sy Oliver, with Lunceford. I listened to Lunceford and Basie. And Duke of course."

Fred said, "First I heard about you was with Tommy Dorsey and *Lonesome Road*. I understand you just walked in with that arrangement."

"Yeah. I heard Tommy's band. He was playing at the New Yorker Hotel. I said, 'I'm gonna write something for him,' and I did. I met him at the New Yorker Hotel. I told him I had this arrangement for him. He told me what night they had a rehearsal. I brought it in and they ran it down."

"And he didn't change a thing."

"No."

"It required two sides of a 78 record. That was a real departure."

"Yeah. I had no idea of length in those days. I just wrote till I was finished."

"Did you study the style of the band before you did it? Of course, he hadn't totally evolved in terms of style, had he? He was doing a lot of Dixie type things."

"The band was mostly Dixieland at that time. There was a faction in the band that wanted to broaden out. So it created a kind of a stir in the band, because it was not a particularly Dixieland arrangement. The guys in the band liked it."

"Bud Freeman told me once he was crazy about it."

"That was it at that time for Tommy. He had Paul Weston and other people on staff."

"Oh yeah. He had Axel Stordahl and Paul Weston and Dean Kincaide."

"And Sy Oliver around the corner."

"Yeah, later. Miller came in to the New Yorker like about a week later and Tommy played the chart for him. And he had my phone number, and Miller called me up that same night and said, 'Would you like to write something for my band?' I'd never heard of him. I said, 'Well sure.' So I wrote a couple of things for him and sent them to him, and one thing led to another and he hired me."

"Did he pay you for the first arrangements?"

"Nope. That was kind of the way things went in those days."

"As far as I can tell, the first recording session with your charts was around February of '39. *Gotta Get Some Shut-eye, Cuckoo in the Clock* and *Romance Runs in the Family.*"

"Oh yeah. Some great tunes. That was the beginning of a long string of dogs that I had to write for him."

"You had to be terribly prolific. I know the song pluggers were after him, but he had such a heavy recording schedule, pretty much from the beginning, didn't he?"

"When I first joined him, he didn't have a recording contract. I joined him in the winter of 1938. It was later, in '39, that he got a deal."

"Did he have the clarinet lead on the saxes in the beginning?"

"Yes."

"So that was pretty well established. And there would be no departing from that."

"No."

"And then you did a session that produced both *Sunrise Serenade* and *Little Brown Jug*. Boy, the movie sure got *Little Brown Jug* fouled up, in terms of how they used it. Because it was such an early thing."

"They had him writing it, which he didn't."

"Was there any concept on *Little Brown Jug* laid down by Glenn before you started working on it?"

"No. It started out, at least, like Sy Oliver style. I was heavily influenced by Sy at that time."

"It certainly was that."

"It seems to me that as the years went by, the band played it faster and faster."

"Too fast. Too fast from the word 'Go.' He would do that. He would take liberties with things I did, much to my chagrin."

Billy May had the same complaint about Miller, as did some of the players: tempos taken too fast.

"Yeah,'" Fred said. "I hear that it wasn't all roses, working for Miller."

"No, it wasn't."

"Did he ever sketch out something for you, and you took it?"

"No. For a period there, we'd get together every week and look over a bunch of tunes, and he'd pick out some tunes to do, and he would often suggest, 'Make this like so-and-so.' And I'd get the tune home, and it didn't want to go that way. So I wouldn't do it. I did it the way I thought. He never complained or said anything, if I didn't do it the way he suggested. But he wouldn't make suggestions off the top of his head. He did a lot of editing on my earlier things, cutting things out. He didn't rewrite anything, or add anything. All he did was cut out if I had too much in there. He cut down the length of things often."

Fred said, "Arrangements all had to conform to that three minute or three minutes ten second limit for recording."

Finegan said, "And they got shorter too, with the juke boxes. They had them timed." "So that you'd put more nickles into the juke boxes."

"That was the idea. The Mafia ran the juke boxes, usually. So they were determining how long the things were that we did, indirectly."

"Artie Shaw told me that lots of times he had to speed things up. He was particularly chagrined about *Blues in the Night*, which he did for Victor. It came in at three-twenty-nine, or something, and they had to cut it back to three-ten."

"Oh yeah, it got shorter than three-ten. Things got down to two forty-five. And a lot of juke boxes were set to cut off at two and a half minutes. The thing would just lift off the record. Most of the things, I'd try to keep 'em down around two-forty-five."

Fred Hall said, "I have to say that one of my very favorites from the beginning has been *Pavanne*. That was by Morton Gould, wasn't it? And I think the band played better on that than it did on anything I'd heard up to that point. The first romantic ballad, other than *Sunrise Serenade*, that I remember is *Stairway to the Stars*, which was a classic from the beginning. Ray Eberly told me once that he felt that things were often pitched too high. Was that a familiar complaint?"

"Nobody ever complained. That was just a miscalculation on my part, if it was pitched too high. There was no design there. It was just accidentally sometimes. Ray never complained. I wish he had. I'd have been more careful about it."

"His ability increased over time, I think. Well, he was just an instinctive singer, wasn't he? And he had his brother Bob to live up to. In a standard arrangement, you get to the point where the singer is going to be introduced, and you modulate a key. Who ever started that?"

"Oh yeah. The average thing with the clarinet lead, which was a built-in must, I'd pick up a good key for that for the first eight or sixteen that came before the vocal. It was never a good key for the vocal, so you'd have to change to suit the vocal. It was just a practical matter."

"My two most favorite arrangements of yours in the early years was *My Isle of Golden Dreams*, which has got a tempo change in the middle."

"I don't remember the tempo change. I barely remember the tune."

"It was a lovely tune. And along came *Johnson Rag*. That was late in '39. That had been done pretty much as a cornball piece up till then, hadn't it? Russ Morgan, that sort of thing."

"Yeah. It was a rag. Not a legitimate rag. But it was a ragtime sounding thing. Miller picked that."

"You did an arrangement for Miller of *Stardust*. And that featured Johnny Best."

"As a matter of fact, Miller did the first half of that arrangement. It was one he had laying around. I think it's the only one we did that way. He asked me to finish it for him."

"I notice that the two of you share credit for it. And that has some very good Beneke on that. What was your view of Beneke's playing?"

"Tex was a good player. I preferred Al Klink. He didn't get *anything* to do. I used to write a solo for Klink and Miller would switch the parts, give it to Tex."

"They were very close, I guess."

"Yeah. And he was making a star, too."

"The player I never understood with that band that I've always been told was very close to Miller was Chummy McGregor."

"They were old buddies."

"How did you find Glenn as a human being, as a character, and as a boss?"

"Do you want the standard answer?"

"No, I want the truth, if you don't mind."

"He was a cold fish. He was totally preoccupied with making a go of it with that band, and human values didn't mean a hell of a lot to him. He didn't have a lot of regard for people. I'm not just talking about me. I'm talking about the whole band, the way he generally treated people."

"He was born to be a major, I guess, as he was later on."

"He *should* have been in the military."

Fred said, "The band managed, in spite of that, to cohere. I never heard a more polished band. But maybe that's because of the drill sergeant attitude."

"Yeah, well, we rehearsed a lot too."

"Did you generally not make records until you'd been on the road with the arrangements for a while?"

"No. Most of the records, the guys were seeing them for the first time on the record date."

"How much run-down would you get to do?"

"Enough to just get it polished up. They had to do it in a hurry. In those days, they did a three-hour record date, and they wanted four sides in three hours. You know, four of these two-forty, two-forty-five things for ten-inch 78 records."

"So you were limited in terms of number of takes, as time began to run out."

"Yeah, well, I dunno. We'd just keep doing it until we got a decent take, then do the next tune, and somehow at the end of three hours, sometimes a half hour overtime, occasionally an hour overtime, we'd get all the stuff on."

Fred said, "My first years in radio full-time were '40 and '41, and I did a lot of dance-band remotes all up and down the east coast, including quite a few with Glenn. The miking at that time was rather simple for those remotes, and yet the balance was pretty good."

"It's always my opinion that the fewer mikes you can use, the better it is — if you place them right, and get the band placed right. The guys would stand or point in or point away. The guys were wonderful with making things shape up in those days. I don't like the multiple-mike thing they do today. I think it's ridiculous."

"Did you enjoy writing the ballads?"

"Yes. The good ones. *Nightingale* was a nice tune."

"You must be proud of that one. You must be proud of a lot of them. You did *Blue Heaven*. Did Glenn use those mostly for closers for broadcasts and things?"

"Yeah. They called them flag-wavers in those days."

"Not too good for dances, though. Didn't he have some conception of playing everything at middle tempo?"

"Yeah. He was very conscious of being a dance band and he didn't want to throw the dancers a curve."

"When you did originals for the band, did Glenn put his name on them, or let you put your name on them?"

"No, he put my name on them. But he had his own publishing company. Everything went into his company, so he got fifty percent anyway."

"I have heard a story that he did get very emotional about some of your arrangements, but not till he got home."

"That's true, yeah. His wife Helen was a good friend of mine. We would just sit together wherever the band was playing, have dinner at the Glen Island Casino, the Café Rouge, places like that. The night of a rehearsal, she'd tell me, he'd come home raving about something of mine. And I'd say, 'Well he didn't rave at the rehearsal.'"

"And he particularly liked *A Handful of Stars*?"

"Yeah. Yeah."

"Did you tour with the band? If there was a performance, would you be there?"

"No. I stayed home and wrote. When they'd be on location somewhere, I'd go there for a while."

"Were you there in the days when *In the Mood* broke at the Glen Island Casino."

"Yes. I was living in Pelham."

"I know they were working their tails."

"We were doing a broadcast every night, and some in the late afternoon from there."

"And you had the Chesterfield show, three nights a week, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday. Did you and Jerry Gray share the duties of writing, for example, *Something Old, Something New, Something Borrowed, Something Blue.*"

"Jerry did most of them. I didn't like to do medleys. I did one, I think."

"I don't remember hearing the show when it started with the Andrews Sisters on it. You get fifteen minutes, you've got openers, closers, and lead-ins to everything. How they got more than two or three tunes done, I don't know. But it was a wonderful show later. I've got to tell you, I miss the dance-band remotes terribly."

"Yeah. Wasn't that great in those days?"

"When you weren't working, you could turn the radio on at night. And the later it got, the more stations you got coming in from the mid-west and so on."

"That was a big part of my musical education through high school," Finegan said. "Starting about ten o'clock at night, every half hour there'd be another band on."

"Sure. You could go from CBS to NBC red to NBC blue to Mutual. I worked for mutual in those days. Mutual would half the time have a class C circuit to the remote, which was a shame, because you lost the high and low ends on the sound. But nobody seemed to pay any attention."

About the same time that Miller took on Bill Finegan, he hired one of the finest trombone players ever to play in his — or any other — band, Paul Tanner.

In addition to his work with Miller, Charlie Spivak, Les Brown, Tex Beneke, Henry Mancini, and Nelson Riddle, Eugene Ormandy, Arturo Toscanini, Leonard Bernstein, and Zubin Mehta, he took master's and doctor's degrees at the University of California at Los Angeles, and then taught there for 23 years: performance, theory, musicology, and music education. He went on to lecture internationally on the history of jazz. His days with Miller left an indelible and happy memory on him, and he wrote a short book about the experience titled *Every Night Was New Year's Eve: On the Road with Glenn Miller.*

He was born on October 15, 1917, in a small town improbably named Skunk Hollow, Kentucky. By the age of nineteen, he was working in a band playing a strip club called the Swing Club in Atlantic City. The advantage of the location was that many of the "name bands" of the period played Atlantic City, and a young musician had a chance to be heard. Miller played the Million Dollar Pier that summer. One evening Tanner looked out past the stripper at the audience, and thought, "Oh my God, it's Glenn Miller! What a way to audition!"

Miller had formed his second band only a month or two earlier. He was sitting with his wife; Helen was apparently unperturbed by the strippers.

Tanner related:

"When the band took a break Glenn motioned me over to his table. I remember, as I stumbled across the floor, that I'd played well and that maybe, if he liked my playing, he'd recommend me to someone in the business. When I arrived at the table, he smiled at me, waved me into a seat, that he'd been impressed by my playing, and that he'd been particularly taken with my high register."

Helen Miller said, in years of retelling the story, that after about a half-hour of stammering, Tanner got up the nerve to ask Glenn if he might use him as a reference when looking for work.

Miller smiled and said, "You're coming with me. How soon can you be packed?" Paul blurted that the only thing he had to pack was his toothbrush, and he had it with him.

The Miller band went from Atlantic City to Hunt's Ocean Pier in Wildwood, New Jersey, where Tanner joined them. He wrote:

"Typical of the period, Hunt's had a huge ballroom with rows of folding chairs along each wall facing the stage area. I wasn't scheduled to play that first night — the trombonist I was replacing was still with the band — but I was eager to establish myself as one of the Miller bandsmen, so I ambled into the ballroom just before they began to play . . . . I headed for the only unfolded chair on the floor and plunked myself into it. The chair collapsed with a monstrous clatter, sending me — arms and legs flying — into a disorganized heap on the floor. I had blown my cool, and it came to me as I lay there in my only suit — with peals of laughter from the band ringing my ears — that I had been framed . . . .

"Glenn, who was wont to bestow bizarre nicknames on those close to him, looked over at me and yelled, 'Come on, Lightning, get your horn and play with us.'

"I knew, as I untangled my six-foot-three frame and struggled to my feet, that I had been christened, and more importantly, been accepted.

"I learned later that it had taken a two-hour effort on the part of the band members to fold and stack all the chairs and to engineer the break-away aspects of the one that had undone me. Then, as now, musicians were known as notorious practical jokers.

"As I uncased my horn and mounted the stand, Glenn shot a sidelong glance at the venerable instrument and asked if I had made it myself. I hadn't, of course, but Glenn's remark hit uncomfortably close to home. The horn had been with me since 1930, had been repaired many times, and had once been rejected for a welding job by a Pascagoula, Mississippi, blacksmith who told me ruefully as he handed it back, 'I'm sorry, son, I only do horseshoes.'"

A few days later, Glenn asked a friend, Simon Mantia of the New York Philharmonic, to test thirty or so trombones to find a good one for Tanner. Tanner paid for it in instalments of five dollars a week for the next five months.

"Before the first week had ended,"my acceptance by the band included being drafted as a somewhat reluctant participant in the football wars waged daily on the beach. I'd never been fond of contact sports . . . . Once in the arena, however, I covered myself with glory by being able to consistently kick the ball farther than any of the other combatants — and *that* while barefoot. Glenn was himself quite an athlete and seemed impressed by my ability to gain airborne yardage."

Tanner said that over the years, he was constantly asked what Glenn Miller was really like. He wrote, "It's a difficult question to answer, and I always hedge a bit by pointing out that I don't actually know. I traveled with him, played music with him and — whenever he invited me, socialized with him, but I knew him only from the point of view of a young starstruck trombone player sitting in his horn section and must describe him from that perspective.

"Glenn Miller was an extremely knowledgeable musician, an astute businessman and a great organizer. He was ambitious, he meant what he said, worked very hard, but was impatient. As the band became more and more famous, his work load kept him occupied to the point that misunderstandings sometimes crept into his personal relationships.

"Although Glenn fronted the most popular band in the world at the time, he played few solos, feeling that if his playing skills were compared to those of Tommy Dorsey, he would come off second best. He was equally reticent about competing with Teagarden, Miff Moles, J.C. Higginbotham and others whom he greatly admired. Yet he played lead for his trombone section with a fine solid tone, good intonation, and consistent quality. In my opinion, Glenn has always been underestimated as a trombone player.

"Glenn continued his study of musical composition until the band's busy schedule forced him to stop. When other arrangers brought him works to be tried out in rehearsal, he either bought or rejected them on the spot, knowing within a few minutes whether or not the material was worth his time, efforts, or financial investment, usually upsetting the writer who had, in most cases, spent weeks preparing the arrangement. On those occasions when he did purchase the music, he would spend hours reworking the entire score in order to achieve a sound consistent with his standards, quite often deleting as much as he retained.

"Glenn had an excellent ear. No questionable note or poor intonation ever escaped his attention and he did not hesitate to fire any player who could not play in tune or read well. To miss a note once in a while was not considered a major sin for a brass player, but to play at the wrong spot in the music was entirely against Glenn's code of professional ethics. He looked upon such an error as an example of carelessness and would not tolerate it. On the other hand, whenever our lead trumpet player Mick McMickle thought a high note seemed particularly risky, Glenn would honor his opinion and change the arrangement.

"There is no doubt in my mind that Glenn Miller was the greatest musical businessman since John Phillip Sousa, and I'm convinced that almost any band leader, with even minimal talent, could have been successful in those hectic days of ballrooms and early radio had he taken the trouble to follow Glenn's lead."

In 1938, the same year that Tanner and Finegan joined the band, Glenn took on a "girl singer" named Marion Hutton, born Marion Thornburg on March 10, 1919, in Battle Creek, Michigan. Her sister, Elizabeth June Thornburg, was born February 26, 1921. She would change her name to Betty Hutton, and Marion took the same surname.

There was a tragic quality about both of them, despite their madcap comedic quality in performance. Their father was a railroad foreman who left their mother for another woman. They heard nothing of him until 1939 when they received a telegram telling them he had committed suicide. With two children to raise, the mother ran a Prohibition-era speakeasy where the two little girls began singing careers. Harassed by the police, the mother moved to Detroit where both girls sang with local bands, and in due course they sang with the Vincent Lopez band in New York. Betty would become one of the biggest film and recording stars of the 1940s, specializing in comic songs such as *Murder, He Says; His Rocking Horse Ran Away,* and *The Fuddy-Duddy Watchmaker*. The sense of sadness is often found in very funny people, the attempt perhaps to conceal or escape from heartbreak. If you watch them in movies — Betty perhaps

reached her career peak in *Annie Get Your Gun* and Marion appeared in the two films Miller made — you will be struck by their physical resemblance to each other, right down to the gestures, the very way they moved their heads. Betty was partly responsible for Marion's joining the Miller band. While Marion was working with Lopez in Boston, Betty pressed Miller on her sister's behalf. Marion told George Simon:

"Finally, Glenn said, 'Come to New York. I'll pay your expenses.' So I went to New York and auditioned with the band. Glenn was kind but he was clipped and not very warm. Betty was so firmly entrenched and I kept apologizing for not being as good. But Glenn kept encouraging me.

"I was only seventeen then, and so Glenn and Helen became my legal guardians. I grew terribly dependent. He represented a source of strength. After all, isn't a little girl always in search of a father? He fulfilled the image of what a father ought to be. If he had told me to walk up Broadway naked, I would have. Of course, I was a people pleaser to begin with. But I was terribly afraid of incurring his wrath."

Marion never considered herself a great singer, nor for that matter did Glenn, who once told a friend, "We'll cover up her singing with good arrangements." At one point, hoping to impress him, she went to a noted voice teacher, and Glenn detected a change in her singing. He asked what she was doing, and she told him. He told her, "Knock off the goddamn lessons. I want you to sound like Marion Hutton." Art Lund had a similar experience when he was singing with the Benny Goodman band. Marion told George Simon: "I was crushed. I realized then there was nothing in the universe except what *he* wanted. It was the Doctrine According to Glenn."

A number of the big bands carried vocal groups, such as the Pied Pipers with Tommy Dorsey and the King Sisters with Alvino Rey, and before that the Rhythm Boys with Paul Whiteman. The Modernaires started as in 1935 as a trio at Lafayette High School in Buffalo, New York. The members, Hal Dickinson, Chuck Goldstein, and Bill Conway, joined the Ted Fio Rito Orchestra, after which they went with the Ozzie Nelson band under the name the Three Wizards of Ozzie. When they joined the Fred Waring Orchestra and took on a fourth member, Ralph Brewster, they became the Modernaires, then went on to a feature position on the Paul Whiteman radio show in 1937 and recorded many of the current songs with Jack Teagarden. They became part of the Miller band — and a definitive part of its sound — in 1941, recording *Perfidia, Chatanooga Choo-Choo,* which purportedly became the first gold record with more than a million copies sold, *I Know Why (and So Do You), Elmer's Tune, Serenade in Blue*, and *I've Got a Gal in Kalamazoo.*

In an autobiography, journalist and one-time *Down Beat* editor Dave Dexter wrote:

"Hal Dickinson was sort of the founder of the Modernaires, in Buffalo, with Chuck Goldstein, Ralph Brewster, and Bill Conway. They were the original four boys. They were with Miller later on. They were with Paul Whiteman prior to that. Hal told me a story. When they were Glenn was riding high, they were appearing in Hershey, Pennsylvania. Hal at that time was dating Paula Kelly, who was singing with Al Donahue's band. They were working in Cincinnati. Hal figured out that if they finished the job in Hershey, he could go to Pittsburgh or the nearest big airport, get a plane to Cincinnati, meet Paula maybe for breakfast and they'd spend a few hours together, and he'd fly back to the next Miller one-nighter, which was in Allentown.

"He got in a taxi, got on a plane early in the morning, flew to Cincinnati, and they spent a good part of the day together. He went to the airport, and the flight was booked up or whatever. He got a plane to Philadelphia, and spent all his money, and there was a limousine strike in Philadelphia. Now he had to get a private taxi to get to Allentown. But he had to make that job. Miller was very strict. The job started at eight o'clock. And the cab pulled up about a quarter to eight. He'd arranged with Al Brewster to have his uniform ready in the dressing room. He ran in, quickly changed his clothes, ran out on stage for the down beat. He's sitting there with the other Modernaires.

Fred Hall asked Bill Finegan, "When you were working with the Modernaires, did the singers have any input? Were the orchestral arrangements written around them?"

"Most of the time, the things with the Modernaires on them, I did the vocal arrangements. I'd play it for Bill Conway, who was kind of the brains of that group. He'd teach it to them. They didn't read. But they had fantastic memories. He'd play a phrase down for them once, and they'd have it."

"Some of their later stuff is so gorgeous. *Rhapsody in Blue* and *Moonlight Sonata*, were those things you brought in or were those things you were asked to write?"

"*Rhapsody in Blue* turned up in the one medley I did. The slow theme. And then Glenn asked me to enlarge on it and make a separate thing on it."

"Was the thought in mind from the very beginning to showcase Bobby Hackett?"

"No. But with Bobby there, how could you not use him? He was wonderful."

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