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Thoughts for the Day

With the perfervid language flying about in what has become The Land of Unending Election, I am reminded of two pertinent observations:

Whenever morality is based on theology, whenever right is made dependent on divine authority, the most immoral, unjust, infamous things can be justified and established.

— Ludwig Feuerbach, philosopher, 1804-1872

Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired signifies, in the final sense, a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and not clothed. The world in arms is not spending money alone. It is spending the sweat of laborers, the genius of its scientists, the hopes of its children . . . .This is not a way of life at all, in any true sense. Under the clouds of threatening war, it is humanity hanging from a cross of iron.

— Dwight D. Eisenhower

The Glenn Miller Years I

My high school years fell during World War II and the latter part of the big-band era. In common with millions of kids, I was a devoted follower of the bands, and I saw most of them, including Jimmie Lunceford, Duke Ellington, Woody Herman, Charlie Barnet, Lionel Hampton, Count Basie, Tommy Dorsey, Gene Krupa, Les Brown, Benny Goodman, and Stan Kenton.

I have given much thought over the years to the causes of the era and then, in the post-war years, the decline of the bands. Essentially the era came about in consequence of the confluence of two factors: the growing popularity in the early part of the last century of "ballroom" dancing, and the rise in the1920s and then domination in the 1930s and 1940s of network radio broadcasting.

Not that there was no social dancing in the nineteenth century. But the forms of it were sedate, quite different from what came about in the band era. To oversimplify, the early years of the twentieth century saw the popularity of two kinds of dance: intimate face-to-face dance to slow music, and athletic dancing that came to have the unfortunate designation *jitterbugging*. With the death of the Victorian era, the slower dancing was often considered scandalous, for it permitted a man and woman to hold each other and move with bodies touching, and everybody knew what *that* did to you. The jitterbugs came to seem more outrageous. They had a love for fast numbers, and the more skilled and adventurous of them were extraordinary athletes. Since I was never much of a dancer at *any* tempo, I paid little attention to them at the time. They were looked on as something of a joke, and newsreels showed segments shot in Harlem. Whirling, swirling, with the men flinging the girls in all sorts of ways, including up over their heads making (egad!) the thighs and panties only too visible. When I see them now in old film footage, I am amazed, at their prowess, not their eccentricity.

During those years, I was, like most jazz and big-band fans, a reader of *Down Beat*, never of course foreseeing that I would one day be its editor. It was in some ways a silly magazine, certainly a frivolous one. Among the other manifestations of its giddy vapidity — chick singers with big boobs on the covers, cute coy headlines in the manner of *Variety* — was its annual readers' poll which, when I was in charge of it, I came to despise. So did many of the musicians even in those earlier days: when Harry James won in the trumpet category, he gave his award to Louis Armstrong.

The magazine divided the bands into swing and sweet categories, always with a tone of condescension or even contempt toward the latter, which included Freddy Martin, Blue Barron, Richard Himber, Horace Heidt, Wayne King, Tommy Tucker, Shep Fields, Sammy Kaye, and Guy Lombardo, the band every jazz fan loved to hate. Indeed, the *Down Beat* poll had a King of Corn category in which Lombardo consistently won.

The "hot" bands included Duke Ellington, Artie Shaw,

Woody Herman, Count Basie, Jimmie Lunceford, Charlie Barnet, Gene Krupa, Glen Gray, Tommy Dorsey, and to my taste Les Brown which, if it wasn't strictly speaking a jazz band, was clean and tasteful with a nice bounce to it and beautiful arrangements, most of the best of them by Frank Comstock. In the war years, my favorite of those bands was that of Tommy Dorsey, playing such incandescent Sy Oliver charts as *Well Git It* and the long, warm, beautiful chart on *Deep River*, issued on two sides of a six-inch 78. As the war came to an end, the wild and fiercely hot Woody Herman band came to the fore, and then came Stan Kenton whose band was later under-rated and indeed denigrated, like that of Paul Whiteman before him. The "hot" bands heavily featured their best jazz soloists, such as Jack Jenney with Artie Shaw. Woody Herman made his soloists, a long succession of them from the Candoli Brothers on through Stan Getz, Zoot Sims, and Al Cohn to Bill Chase, Alan Broadbent, and Gregory Herbert, the very definition of his band, whereas Shaw made himself his principal soloist. Benny Goodman had Teddy Wilson, later Mel Powell, Charlie Christian and Lionel Hampton, but he was known on occasion to fire players who got applause that overshadowed his own. And there were lesser but very good bands, such as that of Teddy Powell, whose career ended when he went to prison for draft-dodging, and Jerry Wald, a clarinetist who imitated Shaw with a fidelity such that (as I learned years later) Artie detested him.

But the line between the "sweet" and "hot" bands was not as clear as the hipper-than-thou fans and *Down Beat* made out, because even Basie and Ellington played a certain number of ballads for the romantic dancers, and some of the sweet bands, including Kay Kyser — whose band was far better than it was generally given credit for, with fine arrangements by George Duning — could play creditable jazz.

The most difficult to define band was also the most successful of the era, that of Glenn Miller. It has been much denigrated. Jo Stafford told me that the members of the Dorsey band considered it a little corny. A lot of musicians, including some of its own alumni, such as the late Billy May, claimed it didn't swing. Miller had, essentially, aside from an earlier band that recorded for Decca and failed, two important orchestras, a civilian band and then a second and larger orchestra which was part of the Army Air Corps. The second, which had a large string section, was far the better orchestra, since it had superior personnel: the brilliant Mel Powell on piano instead of the mediocre Chalmers (Chummy) MacGregor, Ray McKinley on drums, instead of the plodding Maurice Purtill, and others of the first rank. The civilian band lasted scarcely four years, making its first record on September 27, 1938, and its last on July 14, 1942, for a total of 287 "sides". After World War II, a few dozen recordings derived from radio broadcasts made in England turned up, along with a good many recordings made from its pre-war radio broadcasts in the U.S. Not all these recordings were of quality material: there was a large amount of Tin Pan Alley trash. Yet for all the brevity of its life, the Miller band was the most influential of the era, and many LP recordings were issued in its echo under the leadership of Ralph Flanigan and others, and knock-offs of the band still flourish in the U.S. and U.K., all featuring its distinctive sound of clarinet lead on the saxophone section.

But no artist should ever be evaluated other than by his intention. And Miller had no intention of leading a jazz band, despite the presence in his personnel of such fine players as Bobby Hackett and Al Klink. His intention was to form and lead a smoother and coherent *dance* band, and that's exactly what he did. By every testimony, he knew exactly what he wanted and how to get it.

One thing never questioned is Miller's business acumen. It is, on examination, even more finely tuned than is generally believed. He was once described as the smartest businessman of any bandleader since John Phillip Sousa. A better precedent is Paul Whiteman. But the best precedent goes back well before that: Johann Strauss the younger.

In the two hundred and fifty and more years since the death of J.S. Bach, these two men blazoned their names in musical history by forming and leading dance orchestras that became far the most popular of their day: Johann Strauss the Younger and Glenn Miller. Both men achieved their eminence using vulgate music long held to be meretricious, the three-four meter in Strauss's Vienna, the four-four common in Miller's America. Strauss elevated a peasant dance form to the level of acceptance by the Hapsburgs; Miller made American dance music acceptable to the British Royal family, who were among its enthusiasts. Although both men had their detractors, both too had their admirers in high musical places. Strauss was admired by Brahms and Richard Wagner. The late and brilliant Belgian jazz arranger and composer Francy Boland was a devoted fan of Miller's.

It is an axiom of the American culture that only trash achieves wide public favor while the best art struggles for the approval of a small, exclusive, and superior element of the population. Sometimes this is true. But the corollary, that what achieves wide popularity is *ipso facto* no good, isn't. It certainly was untrue in the cases of both Miller and Strauss. A thoroughly studied musician in composition, counterpoint, and harmony, Strauss wrote dance music that has been so universally popular that it is all too seldom examined critically. It is in fact ingenious in construction and elegant

in orchestration. Miller studied with, among others, Joseph Schillinger, and his work as a composer and arranger was notable for clarity and discipline. Consider Strauss's endlessly surprising overture to his opera *Die Fledermaus*. His sound was distinctive; so was Miller's, and it is unerasable in the communal American ear.

There were of course differences. Strauss was married three times and had a taste for actresses. Miller was married once and he was, judging by the testimony of those who knew him, faithful to his wife. Strauss was born the son of a successful orchestra leader and composer in sophisticated Vienna; Miller was born to genteel poverty and hardship in Clarinda, Iowa, and lived in Nebraska in one of the prairie mud huts of American legend. Strauss lived seventy-four years, Miller only forty-two. They seem far apart in time, but they weren't. Miller was born March 1, 1904, a little under five years after the death of Strauss on June 3, 1899.

Like most infants at that time, Miller was born at home, a two-story frame house with a porch at 601 South 16 Street in Clarinda, which is still a small town in the southwest of Iowa. It still stands and houses the Glenn Miller Society, which is run by polite and dedicated volunteers. Part of the street has been renamed Glenn Miller Avenue. The population at the 2000 census was 5,940. Clarinda, named for a niece of the founder, is the county seat of Page County, and as such has a handsome court house.

He was named Alton Glenn Miller, presumably after Alton B. Parker, the candidate for the presidency during that election year, whom Theodore Roosevelt soundly defeated. Parker has the unusual distinction of being the only defeated presidential candidate never to have a book written about him.

Miller's mother, born Mattie Lou Cavender, the stronger of the parents, presumably gave him his name. In his time in the U.S. Army Air Corps he signed all documents Captain (and later Major) Alton Glenn Miller. But he said, "I couldn't stand the name Alton. I can still hear my mother calling me from across the field. 'Alton!' It was never 'Awlton.' 'Alton!' she would call. 'Alton, come on home!' I just hated the sound of that name. That's why I always used 'Glenn' instead."

Glenn was the second of the family's four children: a sister, Irene, and brother would follow. Irene said of her father, Lewis Elmer Miller, "There was something in his personality that kept him from putting it all together. Glenn considered Dad a brilliant man who could have done very well if he could just have believed in himself more. Instead he always felt that someone had it in for him, or that someone else was out to get his job." It was not from lack of trying that he failed. He worked hard as a carpenter and school janitor, among other jobs. He even gave homesteading a try, moving the family when Glenn was five to Tryon, Oklahoma, population 448 in the year 2003. It lies northeast of Oklahoma City, a little under half way to Tulsa. These were the last days of the Wild West, and living in Tulsa at that time was the famous outlaw Henry Starr, nephew by marriage of Belle Starr, who boasted that he committed more bank robbers than the James-Younger and Doolin gangs combined. Starr was a pioneer, the first outlaw to use an automobile in a bank robbery.

Glenn's mother, Mattie Lou, worked hard and long. She gathered cowchips, dried cattle dung burned to furnish heat. Glenn's older brother, Dr. Deane Miller, a successful dentist, said that the family assuaged the hardship of their isolated existence with music. Mattie Lou played the organ. The children sang. Since there was no available school, Mattie organized one and taught classes in the rudimentary subjects, religion among them, with an emphasis on personal responsibility and ethics. This would seem to have contributed to the severity of Glenn's adult character. Elmer Miller, as he preferred to be called, got a job with the Union Pacific Railroad and bought Deane a cornet and Glenn a mandolin. The family endured five hard years in Oklahoma, where the summer heat can be infernal and winters harsh. They narrowly escaped being wiped out by a prairie fire.

In 1915, the family moved to nearby Grant City, Missouri, where, Mattie told the *New York World Telegram*, Glenn sang in a choir. "But he didn't seem to show much talent when he was young," she said. "We gave him and one day he came home with an old battered horn. He'd traded the mandolint off for the horn.. I didn't know he wanted a horn, though I expect all boys like horns. Glenn never said so, but he never said much anyway." He was, then, laconic from the start. He would take his horn out on solitary walks by the train tracks and play it.

His brother Deane, by this time, was playing cornet in the town band. It was a time when almost every town in America had a band, and, usually, a pavilion in a park to go with it. The band in Grant City was led by a store owner named Jack Mossberg who thought that Glenn showed sufficient promise on his horn that he gave him a new trombone, and let him shine shoes in his store to pay for it. Glenn worked before and after school, doing furnace work, sweeping floors, whatever he could find. He even ran a trap line. A neighbor later described him as a bit moody, inclined to tell little stories of what happened to him and laughing. He loved basketball, baseball, and football, and was popular with other children. In 1938, in a self-portrait written for his publicist, he said that he wanted to be a baseball player and admired Theodore Roosevelt and Horatio Alger, whose mythology he

would successfully emulate. He excelled at football but feared, as brass players always do, hurting his mouth. He wrote: "I remember when I was very young following a man with a trombone under his arm until he went into a night club and thinking my ambitions would be realized if I were good enough to work in that club." A nightclub in those tiny prairie towns in those years seems unlikely, but that's what he wrote.

In 1918, as World War I drew to a close, the family moved to Fort Morgan, Colorado, where they lived in a succession of rented homes, including one on Lake Street which, when Glenn was a success, he bought for his mother. He worked in a sugar factory and as a soda jerk, tried his hand as an actor in a high school play, and played end in the school football team, once catching eleven passes in a game and simply falling asleep when he got home. He also played trombone, with no apparent distinction, in the high school band. His high school grades were mostly Cs, one A and some Bs in math. He flunked first-year Latin. He was graduated on May 20, 1921, but missed the ceremonies: he had gone to Laramie, Wyoming, for a band job that turned out not to be there; his mother accepted his diploma.

She always impressed on her children the necessity and virtue of hard work. Glenn's sister Irene, when she was married to Professor Welby Wolfe of the University of Colorado, said, "The relationship among us was just great. It was always better, I think, than we ever realized then.

"I remember the Christmas of 1927 when Glenn surprised us and just walked into the house unannounced. Mother was washing the clothes over a washboard on the back porch and she had a kettle of hot water on the kitchen stove. 'My God, Mother,' he said, 'is this the way you wash clothes?' And the very next day he went into town and bought her a new Maytag washer."

In a letter to George Simon, Irene said that she and Glenn were very much alike. "We both form quick judgments, are stubborn, and have terribly high standards of perfection, besides being, I'm sure, a little hard to live with."

His mother was one of the major forces in his life. She was stoical and puritanical, at one time heading a chapter of the Women's Christian Temperance Union. Glenn was, in his adult years, almost incapable of expressing his feelings, which led some of his associates to think he didn't have them.

Instead of going directly to university after high school, Glenn took his first professional job with the band of Boyd Senter, of whom musicians for years asked: Is he kidding?

Senter was born on a farm on November 30, 1898, and thus was six years older than Glenn. That does not seem like a major difference in your older years, but when you are seventeen it's a lot. Senter decided to become a musician after hearing the Original Dixieland Jass Band on records. The O.D.J.B., as it came to be known, was the first group to record jazz, playing tunes of its own such as *Fidgety Feet, Clarinet Marmalade, At the Jazz Band Ball,* and *Tiger Rag.* Since its first records were issued in March, 1917, Senter was nineteen when he heard them. He had had some lessons on piano, but soon became an acceptable trumpet player and in time learned all the saxophones. It was, however, as a clowning clarinetist that he made his name, and that is why musicians questioned him in later years. But in the early years, barnyard sounds were common in jazz, whose own musicians had not yet learned to respect what they did. One of the O.D.J.B. recordings was *Livery Stable Blues*, and even Benny Goodman made a record called *Shirt Tail Stomp.*

Glenn stayed with Senter for only a short time before entering the University of Colorado at Boulder. His later recording, *Boulder Buff,* would seem to have paid tribute to this period. He played in a band led by Holly Moyer, and completed only three of sixteen semesters, accruing 36 of the 186 credits requisite to graduating. His best mark was in trigonometry, 83, and his worst in modern European history and in music. He flunked a first-year harmony course, with a grade of 50.

But he kept on playing trombone with the Moyer band, and even made tentative attempts at arranging. Of the band's members, banjo player Bill Christensen became a stockbroker and a millionaire, saxophonists Bill Fairchild and Jack Bunch became a furniture store owner and real-estate salesman respectively, and pianist Moyer went on to work for a Denver advertising agency. He and Glenn remained close in later years. Bunch, who roomed with Glenn for a time, became a successful Hollywood musician. He recalled that the band "didn't like the music as written and we developed a lot of our own stuff from listening to phonograph records. One of our favorites was the Cotton Pickers." McKinney's Cotton Pickers, based in Detroit and led originally by drummer William McKinney, was one of the seminal groups of early jazz. With arrangements by Don Redman, it had enormous influence.

After two tours with the Moyer band, Glenn made a trip to seek a job with the Jimmy Joy band led by Jimmy Maloney at the University of Texas. Singing with the band was a notably handsome young man named Smith Ballew, a banjo player who in the late 1920s and early '30s would become a success as a bandleader and then as a star of western movies. Glenn had heard that the Jimmy Joy band was about to lose a trombone player, and hoped to replace him. Smith Ballew said later, "I met him and liked him immediately."

Glenn auditioned but didn't get the job. Ballew said, "We

were playing mostly by ear. Each man had memorized his parts. Practically none were written down. Glenn didn't know what we were doing, naturally. It really wasn't fair." Glenn returned to Boulder, intending to continue in school, but he failed three out of four courses in 1923. He continued with the Moyer band, however, and then decided to drop out of school and concentrate on a career as a musician. He went on the road with an eleven-piece band led by Tom Watkins. They traveled to Mexico and then Los Angeles, where Glenn joined the Max Fisher band at the Forum Theater. Glenn by then had become a good reader and played his parts well.

It was at the Forum that he got the break he had been waiting for, the one that shaped his career: "the interest that Ben Pollack showed in me when he hired me to play and arrange for his band."

Pollack was born into a well-to-do family in Chicago on June 22, 1903, and thus was a year older than Glenn. He was already an established musician when they met. A fine drummer, he played in the early 1920s with the New Orleans Rhythm Kings, then with several groups on the West Coast. In 1925 he formed his own band in Los Angeles. The band, in the next decade, became legendary, for Pollack had an acute ear for talent and through its ranks passed Benny Goodman, Jimmy McPartland, Charlie Spivak, Matty Matlock, Yank Lawson, Harry James, Freddie Slack, Muggsy Spanier, Ray Bauduc, Dave Mathews, and Irving Fazola, also an alumnus of the New Orleans Rhythm Kings. It had excellent arrangers, including Fud Livingston. Chicago at that period was the ultimate conservatory of jazz, and the young musicians in Pollack's band had been heavily influenced by Louis Armstrong, who had come there to play in the King Oliver band. Night after night, young musicians would make the trek to the South Side to hear Armstrong.

The Pollack band was playing at the Venice Ballroom in Los Angeles while Glenn was playing with Georgie Stoll. Pollack was called back to Chicago by the death of his brother. Stoll later became a prominent conductor in films.

One of Pollack's saxophonists was Gil Rodin, who went with Pollack to hear a young musician with Art Kassel's band. He still wore short pants but kept a pair of long pants in a locker for his work with the band. His name was Benny Goodman, and he accepted immediately when Rodin asked him to come to California where he was planning to form and rehearse a band.

Rodin, who had a sharp business acumen, in effect ran the band. Later, he became an executive of the Music Corporation of America (MCA). Of Miller Rodin said:

"Glenn was terribly serious about his music. He had a helluva good sense of humor — I can still see that puckish grin — and he was a real gentleman. But when it came to his music he never took his eye off the ball. It was nothing for him to stay up half the night teaching himself how to arrange out of Arthur Lange's book."

Born April 16, 1889, Lange was a bandleader in the 1920s who recorded extensively. Lange was also an arranger who later wrote movie scores, more than 120 of them. Rodin continued:

"I remember Glenn was playing with Georgie Stoll's band and . . . he had an attack of appendicitis. We tried to cure it with lots of orange juice and gin, but it didn't work and finally one night I rushed him to the hospital for an operation. While Glenn was recuperating back in the apartment, we would have some free-for-alls among the musicians who'd come in to try to make Glenn laugh so his scar would hurt."

Glenn had left the Stoll band to join Max Fisher's pit band at the Forum Theater. Rodin recalled that when Ben Pollack got back from Chicago, they went to hear Glenn during a matinee. "But we really couldn't tell what Glenn could do, because most of what they played was dull, society-band-type stuff. We heard he also arranged, but we had no way of telling which arrangements were his.

"So after the show we went backstage to meet Glenn and he really made no special impression on us — a nice, quiet, well-mannered guy, but that was about all. We asked him to come and sit in with the band, and he did. He didn't impress us tremendously, but . . . we asked him if he was interested in going to Chicago. He knew our band; he'd been in several times to hear us, and I guess he must have been thrilled to be asked to join us.

"But he seemed to be more interested in arranging for the band than playing. That was understandable, because he never had had a chance to write for such good musicians before. We asked him to bring a few of his arrangements to rehearsal and we liked them. He would copy riffs he heard on records . . . and them drop them into his own arrangements. He joined the band then, and right after that Benny Goodman came out and joined us, too . . . ."

Glenn and Goodman became friends, and remained so.

The newly-formed Pollack band returned to Chicago. Trumpeters Al Harris and Hank Greenberg and Glenn comprised the brass, and Fud Livingston, Gil Rodin, and Benny Goodman the saxes, while Goodman's older brother, Harry, played tuba and Wayne Allen played piano. Violinist Lou Kessler doubled on banjo. Collectively they made up what is still remembered as one of the great bands of the era.

One musician who came into the band was cornetist Jimmy McPartland, a member of the so-called Austin High

Gang. McPartland told the late English jazz journalist Max Jones:

"Ben Pollack, now there was a drummer: one of the finest that every lived. He produced as good a beat as I've heard. When he got behind you, he'd really make you go: yes, he'd send you. And he had a marvelous band at the Blackhawk, with Benny Goodman; his brother Harry Goodman on bass; Vic Breidis, piano; Gil Rodin, alto; Dick Morgan, guitar; Glenn Miller, trombone; and, a little later on, Bud Freeman on tenor. Glenn was making arrangements as well as playing, and Fud Livingston also arranged. Both were terrific. That band really swung. We didn't play all jazz, naturally: had to play popular tunes of the day for the customers. But everything we did was musical. The intonation was fine, the band had tonal quality. It was (by this point) a ten-piece outfit, and it played nice, danceable music.

"So that was the band I joined at the Blackhawk. The Blackhawk was a very high-class restaurant and it had good acoustics — a beautiful place to play in."

At one period Glenn and Benny Goodman roomed together. Goodman told George Simon, "We often dated together, too. We'd go out to places like the Four Deuces and the Frolics Café. Glenn liked to drink. Sometimes, when he became overloaded, he'd grow pugnacious — but never with me."

On another occasion, Goodman said:

"Glenn and I in the early '30's hoped we would find enough work to support us. Glenn in those days was exactly the same as he was about eight years later when he became leader of the most popular band in the country. He was an honest, straightforward man and you knew just where you stood with him. He was always serious about his work, but off the job he was an excellent companion with a wonderful sense of humor and a great feeling for the ridiculous. Have you ever heard the nonsensical lyrics he wrote for the Dorsey Brothers record of *Annie's Cousin Fanny*? You had to have a pretty real sense of humor to come up with ideas like those."

It is during this period that one encounters the first evidence of Glenn's departure from his mother's W.C.T.U. persuasion, and the first testimony that when he *did* drink he could be unpleasant.

Gil Rodin said that Glenn at that time was a social drinker. "He was very well liked by the guys. He liked to do what everyone else did. He'd play golf and tennis, and we'd listen to records, and at night, when we weren't working, we'd go out and hear music. All the guys would go to hear Louis and King Oliver, and Glenn would too. But he also liked to hear Roger Wolfe Kahn's orchestra when it played at the Southmoor. He'd go over there every night for a week because he liked that big-band sound and he wanted to see how they used their violins. That's why, when we made our records, we used to add strings to the band, because Glenn was trying to get that sound."

Roger Wolfe Kahn was one of the most interesting figures in the music business of that period. Born October 19, 1907 — he was thus three years younger than Glenn — in Morristown, New Jersey, he was the son of a wealthy German Jewish banker, Otto Hermann Kahn. The young Kahn was said to have learned to play eighteen instruments before he started his own orchestra in 1923 when he was only sixteen. Within four years, he had made the cover of *Time* magazine. Kahn hired the best jazz musicians, particularly for recordings, among them Joe Venuti, Eddie Lang, Artie Shaw, Jack Teagarden, Red Nichols, and Gene Krupa. He wrote some good songs, too, among them *Imagination* and *Crazy Rhythm*.

Kahn was in a similar position to Charlie Barnet, grandson of Charles Frederick Daly, banker, businessman, and vice president of the New York Central Railroad. Barnet was educated at boarding schools in the New York and Chicago areas, and like Kahn — and unlike all the other bandleaders, including Glenn Miller — didn't have to turn a profit with his band. Both of them could do it for fun, and when his band was playing well, Kahn would lie down on the bandstand floor and wave his legs in the air.

In the mid-1930s, just when Barnet was getting started, Kahn lost interest in the music business, disbanded, and turned to another hobby: aviation. In time he became a test pilot and executive of Grumman Aircraft. (Saxophonist Frank Trumbauer, Bix Beiderbecke's close friend and collaborator, also became a test pilot.) Kahn scandalized the New York society pages when he married musical comedy actress and singer Hannah Williams who, after their divorce, married boxer Jack Dempsey and recorded with the Ben Pollack band.

Glenn's interest in strings, then, goes back to the Pollack days. It would take a war and the Army Air Corps to give him the string section he wanted.

In a book titled *Chicago Jazz* (Oxford University Press 1993), William Howland Kenney, clarinetist and associate professor of history and American studies at Kent State University, wrote:

"Ben Pollack and his Orchestra recorded elaborately arranged jazz performances while retaining informality and excitement . . . . The group played in Chicago in the Venetian Room of the Southmoor Hotel and the Blackhawk Tavern, beginning in 1926, and recorded for Victor *He's the Last Word*, a popular song . . . sung by Hannah (Mrs. Jack

Dempsey) and Dorothy Williams, Glenn Miller's demanding, sophisticated arrangement wedded the white tradition of dance band arranging to hot, improvised jazz. Using impressionistic whole-tone scales, dense, odd chordal progressions, parallel and chromatic motion, and unusual modulations (D major to E minor to B-flat minor to E major to D-flat minor and back to E minor), Miller left no doubt of his voice-leading skills and theoretical sophistication. Benny Goodman is the featured soloist . . . ."

Where and when and how Miller acquired this sophisticated knowledge is unknown. There were no text books on jazz writing in those days. One could of course consult the Rimsky-Korsakov or Berlioz or Reginald Forsythe books, but they weren't of much help regarding writing for saxophones. In any case, it must be kept in mind that some of the finest jazz arrangers and composers, including Gil Evans and Gerry Mulligan, have been autodidacts, and Miller appears to be one of them.

The Pollack band went into the Southmoor, where it was an enormous success. Musicians were prominent in the audiences, among them Bix Beiderbecke and Frank Trumbauer. The band made several records for Victor, including *When I First Met Mary*, which Glenn arranged. He added two violinists for that session one of whom was Victor Young, a young native of Chicago who would make his debut as a concert violinist with the Warsaw Philharmonic and then became a major film composer and a writer of exquisite songs, including *Ghost of a Chance, Street of Dreams, Can't We Talk it Over?, Stella By Starlight*, and *My Foolish Heart.*

From the Southmoor, the Pollack band went into the Rendezvous Club, one of the gangster-dominated clubs. Indeed, almost all the clubs were owned or controlled by gangsters, with the heavy hand of the Capone brothers everywhere in evidence. It is one of the curiosities of jazz history that hoods (in Chicago, the word, presumably a contraction of hoodlums, was pronounced to rhyme with foods) were the great patrons of the emerging art called jazz. This is not unprecedented in the history of the arts. Consider the Borgias.

Drummer Ray McKinley said that he owed the gangsters in part for his career and his long friendship with Glenn Miller. McKinley said: "The band I was with was playing in some club there — I can't remember which one — and one night there was some shooting going on and I wound up in the hospital with a bullet in me. But those gangsters we were working for paid all my hospital bills and after I got out they put me up at the Palmer House and really treated me like a king."

The great bassist Milt Hinton, who grew up in Chicago, once described the symbiosis of the gangsters in general and Capone in particular to the community and especially musicians. Milt said. "We looked on Al Capone as more or less a Robin Hood in the black community. There was a lot of shifting of power. It didn't concern us in the black community on the South Side until the thing got pretty big and people realized there was a potential of a lot of money.

"Al Capone had decided to come to the South Side of Chicago and sell alcohol to the people who gave house-rent parties."

Rent parties were a part of the lore of musical evolution in Chicago. And they exemplified the sense of community in the black population of Chicago which, I have been told, did not exist in that of New York. Chicago was *different*. When someone had trouble coming up with the rent money, they'd hire a pianist, throw a big party, and charge admission. Milt's uncle sold Capone's bootleg alcohol to these parties.

"We would sell that to the house-rent parties. We had three trucks. One was El Passo Cigars. One was Ford Cleaning and Pressing. I can't remember the name of the third truck. We delivered to the people giving house-rent parties all the way from 31st Street out to 63rd Street, from State Street to the lake. It was a thriving business. The only thing you needed to do was sit there and take the telephone calls, and deliver.

"And Al Capone came every Thursday or Friday, I can't remember what day it was, in a big car, bullet-proof. He'd come with his bodyguards with a bag full of money. And he would park that car and walk in the back of that place, and the police would be lined up, like they were waiting for a bus. He paid every one of them five dollars, and every sergeant ten. He paid 'em off, so we had no problem with the police at all. You'd never have your house raided.

"Everything was great. There were gang wars, and big funerals with lots of flowers. But then things calmed down because Capone took over the whole city. He had the hotels.

"Labor was making twenty-five, thirty-five dollars a week in the stockyards. A loaf of bread was ten cents. I was fifteen years old. I was getting something like fifty dollars a week.

"This one Saturday afternoon, we were delivering all this alcohol to these different apartments. I was driving the truck. As we were crossing Oakwood Boulevard a lady in a Nash car hit us direct sideways, going full. I went right out the driver's side, out the window. Alcohol was all over. I tried to get up. My arm was broken, my leg was broken, my hand was broken. The finger next to my pinky on my right hand was *off*, hanging by skin. I pulled myself up.

"By the time they got me to the hospital my legs and hands were starting to swell. I was in excruciating pain. And

I'm screaming. The doctor said, 'I've gotta take this finger off.' And I was studying *violin*. I said, 'Please don't take my finger off!'

"Now Capone heard about this accident. Whenever anything happened, he showed up or sent one of his lieutenants. He got my mother and came to the hospital. And I'm screaming, 'Please don't take my finger off.' Capone said to the doctor, 'If he says don't take it off, then don't take it off.

"And what Capone said went. They didn't take it off."

Like Ray McKinley, Woody Herman got shot in Chicago. He was at that time with the Tom Gerun band, which had followed the Paul Whiteman band into the Grenada Café, sometimes called Al Quadback's. It was yet another front for the Al Capone mob, but then every nightclub in Chicago was a mob front. A few years earlier, Guy Lombardo had been playing the Grenada when gangsters entered with machine guns and shot the place to pieces, sending Lombardo and his musicians diving for cover. Woody said the place was always "infested" with hoods.

On the bill with Gerun was Fuzzy Knight, a comedian who would make a name in movies. When they finished work at three in the morning, some of the musicians from the band would go, still in their band tuxedos, to the Grand Terrace Ballroom to hear the Earl Hines band, which worked later than they did.

"One night," Woody told me, "we were in the Grand Terrace, feeling no pain. Fuzzy and I were with Steve Bowers, the bass player with Gerun. Somebody spotted that Fuzzy had a big diamond on his finger. And we were tipping everybody like it was going out of style. So they figured us for live ones. It was winter, and when we came out of there at five or six o'clock in the morning, it was still dark. We got into my little car and headed back to our hotel. We got about a block when we were stopped by a traffic light. A big black sedan drove up, and when that happened in those days, you thought something was going to happen to you. Three guys jumped out. One of them had a gun, the other two had blackjacks. And they kept opening the door of my car. It was a roadster, and the side curtains weren't up. So they were scuffling with us, and they wanted us to get into the big car. Well that was the thing that put us in shock, man. We weren't going to go for a ride, right? So everybody starts flailing around with their arms."

"You were fighting them in the car?"

"Yeah, which is the hard way. And finally, seeing that nothing was happening, these guys figured it was taking too much time, and so the one with the gun shot into the floorboards, and the calf of my leg happened to be in the way.

"We got out of the car, and they started to frisk Fuzzy. The only reason I didn't get knocked out is that I was wearing a black bearskin fur coat and a Homburg hat. They kept hitting me with something, and the Homburg saved my head. A crowd began to gather. And I began to get bored with the whole thing and I walked off."

Fuzzy Knight and Steve Bowers took Woody back to their hotel and sent for a doctor, who put him in a South Side hospital. He was released the next day. When Woody showed up with a cane at the Grenada, Al Quadback, the owner, said, "Look, punk, put your hands up next time."

One night while he was recovering from his own gunshot, Ray McKinley went to the Southmoor to hear the Pollack band. He said, "I talked with some of the guys and, later, when I went to hear the band again, they asked me to sit in. I guess they liked what I did, because when it was over, Pollack took me aside and confided he was thinking of packing up the drums and just leading the band. He said he'd send for me when he was ready, but I guess he never got ready — not for me, anyway." But Miller, years later, did send for him.

The Pollack band went into the Blackhawk. Singer Smith Ballew, who earlier had tried to get Glenn a job with Jimmy Joy, came in to hear the band. By then he had led his own band, but after some difficulties with his booking agent, found himself stranded in Chicago.

"I couldn't work," he said, "because I had no Chicago union card and I had only a few bucks in my pocket. But I just had to hear that Pollack band in person, and so I went to the Blackhawk, hoping I could get by with a sandwich and some coffee. I was barely seated when a guy came to my table, stuck out his hand, and gave me a big hello. It was Glenn Miller. He even picked up my check, thank God."

Glenn introduced Ballew to Pollack, who auditioned him and hired him for $125 a week, "the most I had ever made at this time," Ballew said, "and living in the same hotel with Glenn." The Pollack band's radio broadcasts brought Ballew to the attention of Ted Fio Rito, who hired him for his band.

The Pollack band continued to record, and its broadcasts from the Blackhawk were being heard in New York. Glenn's Chicago days were numbered.

To be continued

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