



American Music Research Center
UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO BOULDER



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Glenn Miller Collections
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Dedicated To
The Glenn Miller Birthplace Society

The Theme of An Era



Alton Glenn Miller

During the big band era of the mid-twentieth century, bands and bandleaders were readily known by their theme songs. Audiences knew at once who they were listening to on network radio broadcasts. As they did with baseball teams and players, the public knew and kept track of every musician in every name band. All of today's descendants of those avid and loyal followers do not recognize most of the bands or their theme songs. There is one clear exception. Wherever they are or however they hear it, twenty-first century listeners know *Moonlight Serenade*, the evocative theme song of popular bandleader Glenn Miller, which has come to be the enduring theme song of the entire era. This is the story of the historic musical arrangement and the talented musician who found a unique style and sound that by 1939 captured the imagination of a generation of Americans who were emerging from the economic depression and poised to rescue humanity from fascism.

Finding the Sound

In August 1925, the aspiring trombonist Glenn Miller was a member of Max Fisher's dance band in Los Angeles. The Fisher band was preparing for an extended tour to the Orient, but Glenn could not go because of an operation for appendicitis. This turned out to be a blessing in disguise, because Miller's first major professional break was about to occur. Ben Pollack was playing at the Venice Ballroom and planned to take his band to Chicago. The band was one of the most influential of its day, and Pollack needed a trombone player. Miller's roommate, Ted Mack (William E. Maguiness), recommended him. Mack played clarinet for Pollack and stayed behind in California. Pollack hired Miller and replaced Mack with Benny Goodman, who became Miller's roommate. The Pollack band went on to record many popular Victor records, including many Miller arrangements. Miller was in demand as a trombone player, left Pollack and stayed in New York in 1928 to strike out on his own. He felt confident enough to ask Helen Dorothy Burger to join him and they were married in New York on October 6, 1928.

Glenn made a comfortable living working in recording studios, radio, and Broadway productions during the Depression. Miller worked with George Olsen's band on the Broadway production *Whoopie!* produced by Florenz Ziegfeld Jr. while playing and arranging for Red Nichols. In November 1929 he was part of a legendary session by Red McKenzie and the Mound City Blue Blowers, led by Coleman Hawkins and including Eddie Condon, Pee Wee Russell, and Gene Krupa. The session included the jazz classics *Hello, Lola* and *One Hour*. He wrote orchestrations for George and Ira Gershwin while working with Red Nichols in the pit band for the musical production *Girl Crazy*. On Broadway, in recording and radio studios, Miller would evolve as a professional and he began to develop a definite feeling of how to blend jazz, popular and traditional music into a distinctive sound and style. He would develop his arranging and organizational skills in putting together bands for Smith Ballew and the Dorsey Brothers and forming important relationships with musicians including drummer Ray McKinley.

In January 1935, Miller accepted an offer from popular British bandleader Ray Noble to form a band in the United States. The brilliant band Miller organized for Noble included future bandleaders Will Bradley (trombone), Charlie Spivak (trumpet), and Claude Thornhill (piano). Creating many popular and innovative musical arrangements for Noble, Miller took the first steps toward creating what would become his identifiable style and sound, as well as a unique musical theme.

Dr. Joseph Schillinger taught a mathematic method for music composition. His students included Miller, George Gershwin, and pianist Oscar Levant. The University of Colorado Glenn Miller Archive preserves Miller's notebooks and exercises with Dr. Schillinger. Glenn's studies with Schillinger included musical exercises that built upon his evolution with Noble and in one instance, would form the basis for the theme music that would come to identify him as America's number one musician and bandleader.

In 1937, Glenn and Helen considered the risks and rewards of forming a road band under Glenn's name and decided to take the risk. The first Miller band opened on May 17, 1937, at the Raymor Ballroom in Boston, then played engagements in New Orleans, Dallas, and Minneapolis. The band recorded for Decca and Brunswick. By December Miller faced financial and personnel challenges. He lost as much as thirty thousand dollars and became dissatisfied with his agency, Rockwell-O'Keefe, and a lack of radio air time and quality future bookings. Tommy Dorsey stepped in to loan Miller money and insert associate Arthur Michaud as Miller's personal manager with an eye toward ownership and switching Miller's representation to Music Corporation of America. The band was talented if "free-spirited." There were several prima donnas and palpable substance abuse. The trade press reported that vocalist Kathleen Lane was also an issue. Most important, Helen became seriously ill and hospitalized. Under the circumstances, Glenn gave the band notice on New Year's Eve. Historians have characterized the 1937 band as a failure. They were artistically sound, however, and Miller was planning to reorganize in 1938. He waited until Helen had recovered, the necessary legal time until his managerial contracts expired, and he had secured solid financial backing.

Mike Nidorf of Rockwell-O'Keefe (later General Amusements Corporation) believed in Miller and successfully fought to keep his account by seeking investors and bookings. Legendary Boston ballroom operator Simon "Cy" Shribman put in substantial seed money, helped pay off the loan from Dorsey, and shrewdly managed Miller's development with Nidorf. The new band opened at Boston's Raymor Ballroom in April 1938 and appeared at New York's Paradise Restaurant in June 1938. Eli Oberstein of RCA Victor signed Miller to a recording contract, and the band made their first records for the RCA Bluebird label in September. Miller had a fighting chance to get on a solid footing and gain exposure with national radio broadcasts. The band caught the attention of Michael DeZutter, manager of the prestigious Glen Island Casino in New Rochelle, New York. With the help of an Iona college student and future Miller employee, Tom Sheils, Nidorf persuaded DeZutter to book Miller for the 1939 summer season. Frank Dailey promptly booked the Miller band into his Cedar Grove, New Jersey, Meadowbrook Ballroom. The Meadowbrook opportunity and the summer season at the casino led to Miller becoming a superstar

When Pee Wee Irwin left Ray Noble, Miller salvaged his high trumpet part arrangements by having Johnnie Mince play the parts on clarinet. The result was the genesis of the so-called "Glenn Miller Sound." During 1937 Miller was trying to develop a lead-tenor reed section and so he hired clarinet player Irving Fazola (Prestopnick). Glenn was not happy paying Faz for a full night's work and only getting partial production. He instructed Fazola to read the lead tenor's music sheet when he was not playing clarinet solos. This resulted in the B-flat clarinet playing the same notes as the B-flat tenor, only sounding an octave higher. Glenn's substitution of Mince for Irwin and his instructions to Fazola were important steps in a style that evolved over time and Miller would soon introduce to Americans on records and radio with the theme song *Moonlight Serenade*.¹

¹ *Finding the Sound* is reproduced from *Glenn Miller Declassified*, © 2017, Dennis M. Spragg

PIANO

For Ham Bourswood

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MILLER'S TUNE

A handwritten musical score for a piano piece titled "Miller's Tune". The score is written on five systems of grand staves (treble and bass clef). The notation includes various musical symbols such as notes, rests, accidentals (sharps, flats, naturals), and dynamic markings (p, f, mf, sf, sfz, sfz). The piece is in a key with two flats (B-flat and E-flat) and a 3/4 time signature. The notation is dense, with many beamed notes and complex chordal structures. There are some handwritten annotations and corrections throughout the score, including a large "8" written below the first system and a "10" written below the second system. The paper is aged and yellowed, with some staining and a small tear at the bottom right corner.

The Band That Made It

Glenn Miller created the music that became his theme song when he worked for Ray Noble. During his studies with Dr. Schillinger, Glenn sketched out the composition as part of an arranging exercise. On May 23, 1936, he privately recorded the exercise with musicians from Noble's band. This historic recording exists. In August 1936 Glenn gave a hand-written copy of the music, which he had titled *Miller's Tune*, to a friend in Colorado. The University of Colorado Boulder Glenn Miller Archive preserves that manuscript. Later in 1936, Eddie Heyman wrote lyrics for the tune, which he named *Now I Lay Me Down to Weep*. That seemed to some to be a little dreary, so even later in 1936, *The Metronome* editor George T. Simon took a turn and wrote lyrics for the music that he retitled *Gone with the Dawn*.

Glenn started using the theme music for the band he formed in 1937 but he did not name it or perform the lyrics written by either Heyman or Simon. He continued using the unidentified theme music for the band he reformed in 1938. Glenn and the band made progress with engagements and broadcasts at the Paradise Cabaret & Restaurant in New York. RCA Victor-Bluebird records signed Miller to a recording contract and he was about to play enormously important 1939 engagements at the Glen Island Casino in New Rochelle, New York and Frank Dailey's Meadowbrook Ballroom in Cedar Grove, New Jersey. Both venues brought with them an extraordinary amount of national broadcasting exposure over NBC's Red and Blue networks and the Mutual Broadcasting System. During early 1939, Robbins Music Corporation signed a contract to publish the Miller theme song and they assigned Mitchell Parish to write lyrics for it, which he titled *Wind in the Trees*. Sometime between March 23 and March 27, Abe Olman of Robbins Music learned that Miller was preparing to record Frankie Carle's composition Sunrise Serenade for RCA and that the Miller theme song was going to back it on the "B" side of the planned Bluebird 78rpm release. Olman suggested that the theme be retitled Moonlight Serenade to pair with the "A" side and the rest of the story is history. Glenn agreed, and Robbins published his theme as *Moonlight Serenade*.

Glenn Miller and his Orchestra had opened their first of two 1939 engagements at Frank Dailey's Meadowbrook Ballroom on March 5, 1939. The first surviving instance that we have of Glenn and the band playing *Moonlight Serenade* by its final and well-known name is on the NBC-Blue sustaining remote of March 27, 1939, broadcast from Midnight to 12:30 a.m. From that point forward, the theme music and the band rocketed to national prominence and immortality. The Bluebird record of *Moonlight Serenade* made the music popularity. Glenn's theme made the "Your Hit Parade" poll of Top 10 Tunes at the rank of #6 for two weeks in 1939, September 30 and October 14. By the close of 1939, Glenn embarked on his "Chesterfield Moonlight Serenade" commercial radio series over CBS for sponsor Liggett & Myers Tobacco Company and the Newell-Emmett advertising agency. Glenn Miller had become America's number one bandleader with a distinct and readily identifiable musical style that was instantaneously and forever recognizable from the first few bars of his theme *Moonlight Serenade*, which continues to entertain new audiences eighty years after Glenn made the record and broadcast his theme "from coast to coast."



*Glenn Miller
Glen Island Casino
New Rochelle, New York*



*Glenn Miller and his Orchestra
Frank Dailey's Meadowbrook Ballroom
Cedar Grove, New Jersey*

Slumber Song

Glenn Miller played his theme song at every personal appearance and the opening and closing of radio broadcasts by Glenn Miller and his Orchestra. On October 7, 1940, he introduced a new alternate theme, *Slumber Song*, as a closing theme on NBC sustaining broadcasts from the Café Rouge of Hotel Pennsylvania in New York, in anticipation of the January 1, 1941 ban of ASCAP-licensed music by radio networks and stations. The band continued to use *Moonlight Serenade* as the closing theme on their CBS Chesterfield programs until December 31, 1940 while using *Slumber Song* to close the NBC sustaining broadcasts. During December, Glenn phased-in *Slumber Song* as the opening theme from the Café Rouge. Beginning January 1, Miller had to use *Slumber Song* as both his opening and closing theme on the CBS Chesterfield programs and all sustaining broadcasts. When ASCAP and the broadcasters resolved their differences on October 30, 1941, Miller resumed playing *Moonlight Serenade* as his opening theme but kept *Slumber Song* as his closing theme on all broadcasts until September 1942, when he disbanded to join the Army.

I Sustain the Wings

During his military service, Miller did not initially use *Moonlight Serenade* to identify his Army Air Forces Training Command Orchestra, but a new AAFTC theme, *I Sustain the Wings*, which also became the title of Miller's AAFTC NBC radio series. However, the AAFTC Orchestra did record and broadcast a beautifully updated arrangement of *Moonlight Serenade* that included the large string section of the orchestra. When Miller's radio production unit and orchestra deployed to the European Theater of Operations, Glenn resumed using *Moonlight Serenade* as the opening and closing theme of his "American Band of the AEF" and "Moonlight Serenade" broadcasts for the Allied Expeditionary Forces Programme of the BBC (AEFP), and the "Music for the Wehrmacht" broadcasts that the unit recorded for the Office of War Information's American Broadcasting Station in Europe (ABSIE). *Moonlight Serenade* was instantly recognizable to both allied and enemy forces and civilians. Major Glenn Miller's music became a beacon of American values and culture, and the soundtrack of a generation.

The Glenn Miller Orchestra

Following World War II, Tex Beneke and the Glenn Miller Orchestra continued to use *Moonlight Serenade* as their theme and recorded it for RCA Victor in 1947, using a modified version of the Army Air Forces arrangement with strings that appropriately featured a tenor saxophone solo by Tex. When the band was gradually re-branded as Tex Beneke and his Orchestra, their theme remained *Moonlight Serenade*. Later, starting with Ray McKinley in 1956 and until the present day, led by Nick Hilscher, the Glenn Miller Orchestra continues to open and close their engagements and appearances around the nation and the world with the instantly recognizable and evocative theme *Moonlight Serenade*, which at once identifies the music of Glenn Miller and the entire big band era.

Dennis M. Spragg
January 2019

Discography

MOONLIGHT SERENADE

Glenn Miller (composition), Mitchell Parish (lyrics)
Score #9 in the Glenn Miller Music Library

Glenn Miller used *Moonlight Serenade* as his opening and closing theme for radio broadcasts and personal appearances, with the exceptions noted in the preceding description. There is one surviving instance of the band broadcasting Moonlight Serenade with the vocal lyrics, which occurred on June 19, 1939 and performed by Ray Eberle. The extant recordings and broadcasts of the individual tune not broadcast as a theme are as follows:

Glenn Miller and his Orchestra

Recordings

| | |
|-----------------------|---|
| May 23, 1936 | Movement 1 |
| May 23, 1936 | Movement 1 Alternate take |
| May 23, 1936 | Movement 2 |
| May 23, 1936 | Movement 3 |
| May 23, 1936 | Movement 4 |
| April 4, 1939 | RCA master 035701-1, issued as Bluebird B-10214, etc. |
| April 4, 1939 | RCA master 035701-2, Unissued Alternate Take |
| March 24-May 3, 1941 | 20th Century-Fox Studios, <i>Sun Valley Serenade</i> |
| March 23-May 22, 1942 | 20th Century-Fox Studios, <i>Orchestra Wives</i> |
| March 23-May 22, 1942 | 20th Century-Fox Studios, <i>Orchestra Wives</i> , Alternate Take |

Glenn also broadcast a stand-alone Moonlight Serenade on his April 22, 1942 Chesterfield program. Someone the Miller Estate or RCA broke and destroyed the disc, so the performance does not survive. RCA 035701-1 was remastered for the Army Special Services' V-Disc program as VP 75 – 138, issued as V-Disc 39-A (B release, November 1943) and Navy V-Disc 160-A (H release, February 1945).

Broadcasts

| | |
|----------------|--|
| June 19, 1939 | <i>Glen Island Casino, New Rochelle, New York (NBC-Blue)</i> |
| July 10, 1939 | <i>Magic Key of RCA, Radio City, New York (NBC-Blue)</i> |
| March 26, 1940 | <i>Chesterfield Moonlight Serenade, New York (CBS)</i> |
| April 1, 1940 | <i>Madison Square Garden, New York (WABC)</i> |

The April 1, 1940 performance included the combined bands of Will Bradley, Tommy Dorsey and Glenn Miller, performing at the Greater New York Fund Town Meeting fundraiser.



Capt. Glenn Miller at NBC

Glenn Miller Army Air Forces Orchestra

Recordings

| | |
|-------------------|---|
| April 21, 1944 | NBC, New York, <i>Music from America</i> , program no. 11 (OWI) |
| October 30, 1944 | EMI Studios, London, <i>Music for the Wehrmacht</i> (ABSIE) |
| October 30, 1944 | EMI Studios, London, <i>Music for the Wehrmacht</i> (ABSIE) |
| November 6, 1944 | EMI Studios, London, <i>Music for the Wehrmacht</i> (ABSIE) |
| November 27, 1944 | EMI Studios, London, <i>Music for the Wehrmacht</i> (ABSIE) |
| November 27, 1944 | EMI Studios, London, <i>Music for the Wehrmacht</i> (ABSIE) |

Broadcasts

| | |
|--------------------|--|
| September 11, 1943 | <i>I Sustain the Wings</i> , New York (CBS) (borrowed tune in medley) |
| April 8, 1944 | <i>I Sustain the Wings</i> , 6:00 p. m., New York (NBC) (borrowed tune in medley) |
| April 8, 1944 | <i>I Sustain the Wings</i> , 11:30 p. m., New York (NBC) (borrowed tune in medley) |
| August 2, 1944 | <i>Strings with Wings</i> , Bedford (AEFP) (string section) |
| September 13, 1944 | <i>Strings with Wings</i> , Bedford (AEFP) (string section) |
| September 23, 1944 | <i>Strings with Wings</i> , Bedford (AEFP) (string section) |
| February 26, 1945 | <i>American Band of the AEF</i> , Paris (AEFP) (borrowed tune in medley) |
| November 17, 1945 | <i>I Sustain the Wings</i> , New York (NBC) (borrowed tune in medley) |

The *I Sustain the Wings* broadcast of November 17, 1945 was the final broadcast by Glenn Miller's AAF Orchestra from Bolling Field, Washington, DC.



Gordon Lee "Tex" Beneke

Tex Beneke and the Glenn Miller Orchestra

Tex Beneke and his Orchestra

Recordings

| | |
|----------------|---|
| September 1946 | RKO Studios and Walt Disney Productions, <i>Melody Time</i> |
| March 10, 1947 | RCA master D7VB-637-1, issued as RCA Victor 20-2273, etc. |
| June 10, 1947 | <i>Your Date with Deb</i> , recording for radio series |
| December 1947 | Universal Studios short feature, <i>Tex Beneke</i> |
| January 1948 | Universal Studios short feature, <i>Sweet Serenade</i> |
| May 30, 1949 | RCA master ND9-MM-8046, issued on RCA Thesaurus 1499 |
| Undated 1949 | RCA master D9-MM-2419, issued on RCA Thesaurus 1525 |

Broadcasts

| | |
|------------------|--|
| March 10, 1947 | <i>Chesterfield Supper Club</i> , 7:00 p.m., New York (NBC) |
| March 10, 1947 | <i>Chesterfield Supper Club</i> , 11:00 p.m., New York (NBC) |
| July 18, 1947 | <i>Chesterfield Supper Club</i> , 7:00 p.m., New York (NBC) |
| July 18, 1947 | <i>Chesterfield Supper Club</i> , 7:00 p.m., New York (NBC) |
| February 6, 1948 | <i>On the Beam</i> , Seattle (Mutual) (rebroadcast by AFRS) |

Acknowledgments

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 Images courtesy of Ed Polic, Dennis Spragg and the University of Colorado Glenn Miller Archive.
Glenn Miller Declassified is available from Potomac Books and the University of Nebraska Press.

Gallery



*RCA Bluebird Record
April 1, 1939
Flip Side "A" is Sunrise Serenade*



*RCA Victor Record
Tex Beneke and the Miller Orchestra
March 10, 1947*











