

MAY 2017



BIG BAND NEWS

by Music Librarian **CHRISTOPHER POPA**

SYMPOSIUM IN SWING, NO.4:



There were dozens of legendary big bands during the 1930s and '40s, yet it seems that the best-remembered and best-loved of them all remains the one that was led by trombonist-arranger Glenn Miller [1904-1944]. And I suppose there are a number of reasons for that.

After Artie Shaw abandoned his band in November 1939, Miller's rose to the top of the popularity polls and held that position while America got dragged into World War II and he voluntarily entered the Army Air Forces in the fall of 1942. There, Miller formed a magnificent, large orchestra (some say the best ever) which entertained the Allied troops.

The fact that he lost his life in a perplexing manner while serving his country added to his mystique.

Over the years, several of his former sidemen carried on his musical sounds, including saxophonist-vocalist Tex Beneke [1914-2000], arranger-composer Jerry Gray [1915-1976], and drummer Ray McKinley [1910-1995].

Even though some of them came very close or brought elements of interest on their own, the magic edition of the orchestra—and, of course, it was a product of its time—was the one with Miller himself at the helm.

Miller's recording of *Star Dust*, which he and Bill Finegan arranged, was made January 29, 1940 for the Bluebird label and seems superb to me. Along with *A String of Pearls*, *Perfidia*, *I Know Why*, and *Long Ago (And Far Away)* it remains one of my personal favorite Miller performances.

Star Dust begins with that glorious and romantic Miller "reed" sound—that is, Willie Schwartz's lead clarinet playing in a harmonized voicing with two alto saxophones (Hal McIntyre, Jimmy Abato) and two tenor saxophones (Tex Beneke, Al Klink). Pianist Chummy MacGregor provides a brief solo on piano, before Beneke warmly takes over for eight bars. Then all of the reeds return with another shimmering soli, followed by, according to Miller bio-discographer John Flower, a trumpet solo by Clyde Hurley and, at the end of the record, clarinetist Schwartz.

However, on the official website for trumpeter Johnny Best, who was also in Miller's band on the *Star Dust* record date, it is implied that Best played the solo and, in fact, considered it his most memorable and personal favorite. If Flower is correct about Hurley, then Best was given the solo spot on *Star Dust* after Hurley left the band in late May of 1940.

Miller continued to play the song *Star Dust* with his Army Air Force Band, but it was in a completely different arrangement done by Ralph Wilkinson.

Whichever keeper of the flame, imitator, or tribute, for that matter, that played the civilian band arrangement of *Star Dust* after Miller never quite got it right.

While Ray McKinley led The New Glenn Miller Orchestra from 1956 to 1966, they re-recorded many of the songs and instrumentals from Miller's original and AAF music libraries, yet *Star Dust* was not one of them. When the McKinley-led Miller band performed *Star Dust* live, on an episode of the "Glenn Miller Time" TV show in 1961, it seemed slightly fast—but perhaps that was done to squeeze in all of the music during that half-hour program.

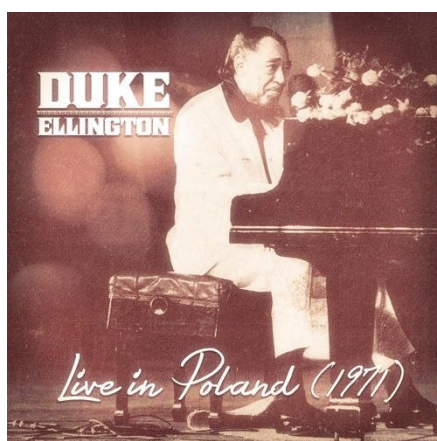
Curiously, when McKinley appeared with his own band in later years, he always introduced *Star Dust* as the song at the very top of the all-time hit parade, so that should have been a natural to re-record.

Nor did the Time-Life "Swing Era" series, conducted by Billy May from 1969 to 1972, recreate Miller's *Star Dust* (instead, they did Artie Shaw's version, which many consider the most classic recording of the song).

Star Dust by Glenn Miller and His Orchestra was on the black and silver "A Memorial: 1944-1969" 2-LP set, RCA Victor number VPM-6019, and also was one of the first 45s that my Brother, Jay, and I bought from a music store in our hometown. That was an RCA Gold Standard release, 447-0047, with a red label. And we still have and enjoy both!

REVIEW AND PREVIEW

DUCAL DELIGHTS



No less than three new CDs by Duke Ellington, each with quite different material.

The two CDs of “The Treasury Shows: Volume 23,” DETS (Den) 903 9023, pack together a series of broadcasts from the Meadowbrook Gardens Café in Culver City, California, plus some bonus material from 1943-46. Only two more volumes to go in the “Treasury” series!

“An Intimate Piano Session,” Storyville (Den) 101 8445, presents a never-before-released Ellington solo session from August 1972, along with three extra tunes by just Duke, organist Wild Bill Davis, bassist Victor Gaskin, and drummer Rufus Jones, played at the conclusion of the full Ellington band concert at Rotterdam in November 1969.

“Live in Poland (1971),” Squatty Roo Records CD-R, documents the Ellington band in Warsaw, Poland, during its final European tour.

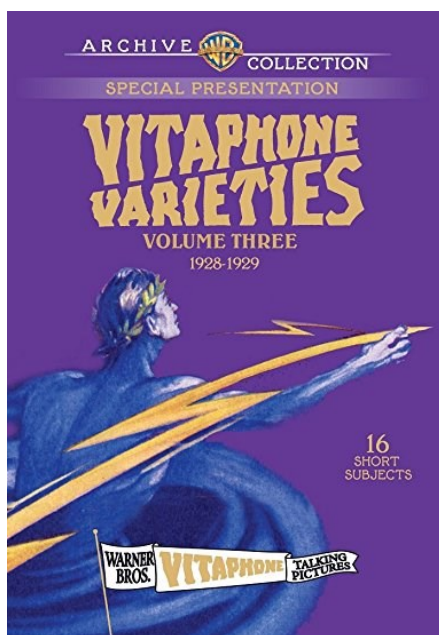


The latest of the Japanese mini-LPs put out by Roulette / Warner in Japan. And like the others (“Jack Teagarden at the Roundtable,” “A Portrait Of Mr. T,” and “Jack Teagarden: Jazz Maverick”), if you’ve got the Mosaic “Complete Roulette Jack Teagarden Sessions” boxed set, you’ve got this material—though without each LP’s individual artwork.



A four-CD set, JSP (E) 976, but not to be confused with JSP’s earlier 5-CD Berigan set, “The Key Sessions: 1931—1937,” which came out in 2004. This one has Bunny with his own band, with Goodman, the Dorsey Brothers, etc. performing an even 100 songs and instrumentals.

NEW DVD



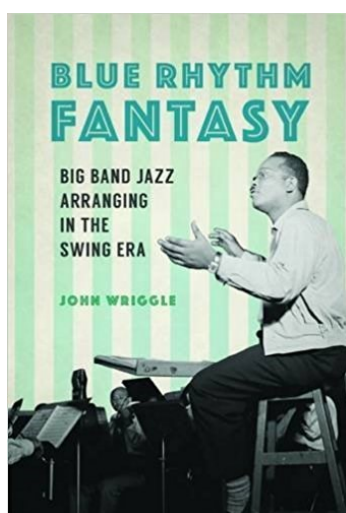
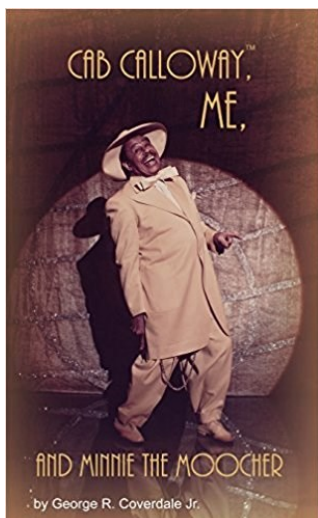
Sixteen short subjects, including one with Horace Heidt and His Californians (an early predecessor to his Heidt’s Musical Knights) and another with Ben Bernie and His Orchestra, on a DVD-R from Warner Brothers Archive.

As part of publicity for the new DVD, here are the notes written by The Vitaphone Project's Ron Hutchinson about those two big band shorts:

Horace Heidt And His Californians (1929) – While his later band became very sweet, Horace Heidt's first orchestra frequently played hot, jazz dance tunes. As this short clearly demonstrates, his was decidedly a performing band. They didn't just sit there and play. The musicians sang, danced, and did piano stunts. As was a common practice in the twenties, the band even has an on-stage mascot: Lobo the dog, who provides a barking coda to this entertaining short.

Ben Bernie And His Orchestra (1929) – Known as 'The Old Maestro', Ben Bernie always combined comedy with great musicianship. Recording extensively for Brunswick records, his band was also among the first to perform in talking pictures. Before this Vitaphone short --- which cleverly uses Warner Bros owned pop tunes from their current musicals --- Bernie had already made sound shorts for Deforest Phonofilms in 1925 and several Fox Movietone Act shorts in 1928. He went on to become a top rated star in radio, made a number of feature film appearances with his 'nemeses' Walter Winchell. He died in 1943 while still at the height of his popularity.

NEW BOOKS



On the left, a 96-page memoir (Pittsburgh, PA: Dorrance Publishing Co., 2017) written by one of Calloway's nephews who often served as valet, driver, and assistant when the famous bandleader was on the road in 1978-90.

Evidently the name "Cab Calloway" has been trademarked but I don't recall seeing anyone's name with the trademark symbol included in the title on the front of a book.

Other than the cover illustration, which I recognize as Cab posing in the early '70s wearing a yellow zoot suit, images in the book should have been reproduced better and with identification.

On the right, a quite scholarly 320-page book by John Wriggle (Urbana, IL: The University of Illinois Press), studying jazz arrangers of the '30s and '40s and attempting to fill a hole by focusing on the neglected African-American arranger Chappie Willett [1907-1976], whose work attracted the interest of Louis Armstrong, Gene Krupa (*Apurksody*, *Grandfather's Clock*, *I Know That You Know*, and *Rhythm Jam*), and others. That's arranger-composer Sy Oliver pictured on the cover.

The book has a nine chapters, bibliographical references and an index—and it's interesting reading.

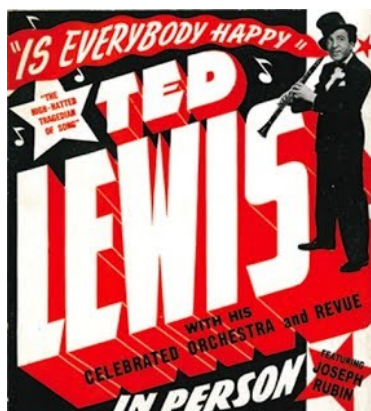


Don't forget the big 40th anniversary Ted Lewis Festival taking place in his hometown of Circleville, Ohio from the 9th through the 11th of next month!

The newly-renovated Ted Lewis Museum at 133 West Main Street will hold a grand re-opening, Ted Lewis' 1943 Columbia Pictures film biography "Is Everybody Happy?" will be shown at the Pickaway County Main Library at 1160 North Court Street, and award-winning author and Editor of the Vintage Jazz Mart record trading magazine, Mark Berresford, will lecture about Ted Lewis.

Plus a kiddie carnival, a turn-of-the-century medicine show, a vintage phonograph demonstration, and a concert will be held at various times in Ted Lewis Park at 443 North Court Street.

For me, the highlight of the weekend happens Saturday night the 10th, when "The Ted Lewis Orchestra Revue of 1952" is presented live at Circleville High School at 380 Clark Drive. Headlining will be The Ted Lewis Orchestra directed by Joseph Rubin and special guest singer Cathy Basic Van, who appeared with Lewis from 1955-60. Tickets for the show are only \$10!



Is everybody happy? Yes, we are!