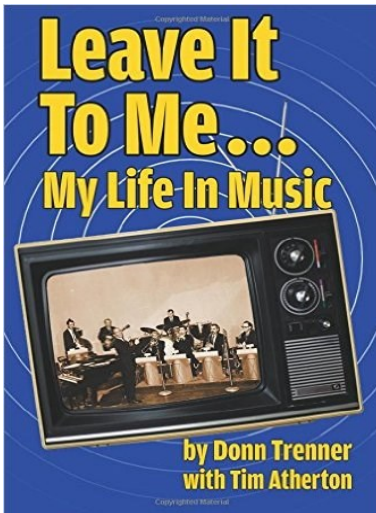


compiled by Music Librarian Christopher Popa



BOOK REVIEW: DONN TRENNER AND THE BIG BANDS

In his autobiography written with Tim Atherton, Leave It To Me... My Life In Music (Albany, GA: Bear Manor Media, 2015), pianist-arranger Donn Trenner remembers, in part, the era of the big bands.

His comments are, at different times, historical, thought-provoking, and amusing.

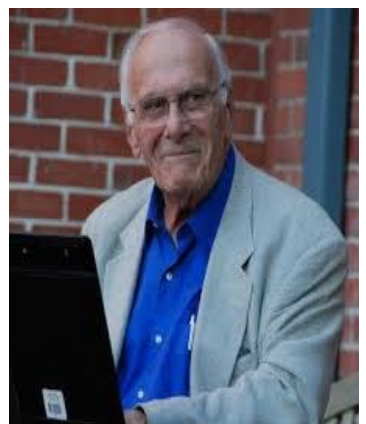
Of course, I personally wish that the entire book was Trenner's memories of the bands (in actuality, he takes less than 20% of the book to cover that period), but, as its title promises, it tells the story of his entire life in music. Still, what he does include is interesting to read.

For example, in 1943 while a student at James Hillhouse Comprehensive High School in New Haven, CT, Trenner would see Glenn Miller in the morning walking to work at Yale University, where his new Army Air Forces Band was stationed. "I was impressed with the whole feeling of how that orchestra existed," Trenner commented. "I got a feeling of real importance and substantial musical endeavor."

At the invitation of Perry Burgett, one of Miller's arrangers, Trenner wrote a chart on *I'm in the Mood for Love*, which Trenner states was played by Miller at an assembly program at his school.

Very proud from that moment, Trenner had formed his own band while at the school. His players included lead trumpeter Milt Zudekoff, the brother of trombonist Moe Zudekoff, later well-known as "Buddy Morrow."

"The music was structurally well-conceived, written by highly skilled writers and played by distinctly talented musicians," Trenner, now age 89, observes.



In 1945, while still a teenager, Trenner was hired by Ted FioRito. “He was a fine pianist and nice fellow,” Trenner reminisced.

Trenner spent 15 months in the service, including a stay in band barracks with young trombonist Billy Byers. “He became a legendary arranger and was a ghost writer for Quincy Jones,” he reports. “Bill was a unique and strange man. I’ve never known anyone that wrote music quite the way he did. He could sit in a room, watch a ball game while listening to some music, and write horizontally across a score page in ink a lead alto part, then the second alto part, then the first tenor part, then the second tenor part, and then the baritone part. All this, while doing several other things at the same time.”

One night, Trenner heard Dizzy Gillespie at the Three Deuces Club on 52nd Street in New York City. “At the Deuces, some girl singer came out after being introduced, and Dizzy, with his devilish sense of humor, turned his horn around and sort of goosed her with the mouthpiece. It was Billie Holiday,” Trenner recalled.

In 1946, Trenner briefly worked with Blue Barron’s band, which he called “one of the worst hotel orchestras I ever heard . . . It required me to play a real ‘boom chuck’ style. I told the leader, Harry Friedland, ‘I can’t do that, it’s not music.’”

Trenner also worked just one week in 1946 with Tommy Dorsey.

And he says he was offered—but turned down—a job as pianist with The Glenn Miller Orchestra directed by Tex Beneke.

He did switch to a few months with Chuck Foster’s band, before joining Buddy Morrow in 1947. “He had a reputation of being able to execute anything written for any instrument on the trombone,” Trenner noted. “I enjoyed being with Buddy.”

Trenner went on the road with Charlie Barnet in 1950-51. “He was a fascinating individual with a good fiery orchestra.” Trenner commented.

In the early ‘50s, Trenner worked with Jerry Gray’s band in the Los Angeles area, mostly on club dates and at the Hollywood Palladium, then starting in 1954 he became a member of Les Brown’s band. “Les Brown’s orchestra had a consistently tight rhythm section,” Trenner remarked. “In an orchestra, the rhythm section is usually made up of piano, bass, drums, and sometimes rhythm guitar. It has to be almost perfect. If it doesn’t come together really well, then the orchestra can’t swing. Trenner stayed with Brown, off and on, until 1961. “The whole time with Les’ orchestra was a really wonderful experience. The music was always good. Sometimes it was great and sometimes it was sensational. There were so many outstanding players and the repertory represented exemplary writing from the many great composers and arrangers.

One of the members of Brown's band, baritone saxophonist Butch Stone, became an inspiration for Trenner. "As road manager, Butch was a master of psychology. He could deal with the orchestra and the pitfalls of each day, anything from a difficult schedule to hotel logistics to problems in restaurants, when the food wasn't good or we couldn't get waited on, or any of the various challenges for being on the road."

Trenner later worked with many other stars, such as Rosemary Clooney, Steve Allen, Nancy Wilson, Ann-Margret, Alan Copeland, and Shirley MacLaine. Most of them he remembers as good people, but he names others who, for various reasons, he was not as enamored with, including George Cates, Lennie Hayton, Jack Carter, Milton Berle, Raquel Welch, and Jack Jones.

Every once in a while, Trenner drops in some little-known tidbit, such as identifying the older brother of comedian Bill Dana (who used to say, "My name is Jose Jimenez") as Irving Szathmary, an arranger for Paul Whiteman in 1938-40.

Trenner's book is easy to read, though the photographs are not reproduced clearly and there are some typos or mis-spellings throughout the text.

BIG BAND LIBRARY RATING:

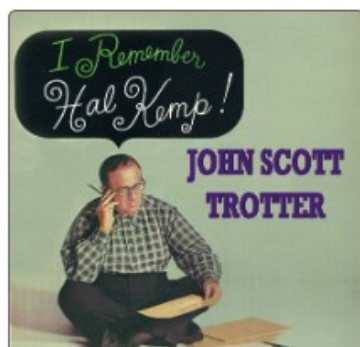
Donn Trenner has had an interesting career and his story makes for a good read.

NEW COMPACT DISCS



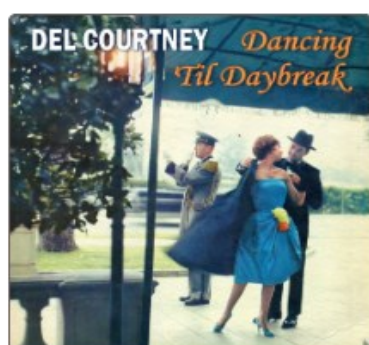
Vaughn Monroe And His Orchestra
"His Greatest Hits:
The Manly Voice Of The Forties"
Sounds of YesterYear (E) DSOY 2037

25 songs familiar to Monroe fans, like *Racing with the Moon*, *There! I've Said It Again*, *Ballerina*, and *Riders in the Sky* (*A Cowboy Legend*). Yet many other good records of his have never made it to CD.



John Scott Trotter
"I Remember Hal Kemp!"
Music Boutique CD-R

Trotter got his professional start with Kemp's band while at the University of North Carolina in the 1920s and stayed on as his pianist and arranger until 1936. This tribute was recorded for Decca in August and September of 1960, and released as DL7-4076.



Del Courtney
"Dancing 'Til Daybreak"
Music Boutique CD-R

Initially a 1958 Capitol LP, catalog number T 1070, and ignored by them since then. Songs include *Rose Room*, *Undecided*, *Cocoanut Grove*, *All Or Nothing At All*, plus four medleys.



Duke Ellington And His Orchestra
“The Treasury Shows: Vol 21”
D.E.T.S. (Sw) 939 9021

Another 2-CD set in the “Treasury Shows” series, this one on the air in July 1946, plus two bonus broadcasts from 1942. The tunes include *Teardrops in the Rain*, composed by Ellington trumpeter Cat Anderson.



“Air Mail Special”
Lionel Hampton and his All-Stars
Universal / Clef (J)

Only four tunes on this CD — *Airmail Special*, *Soft Winds*, *The Way You Look Tonight*, and *It's Only a Paper Moon* — but they run 7:39, 6:13, 11:17, and 6:53 respectively. Buddy Rich is on drums.

THE MILLER SOUND IS WORLDWIDE

Glenn Miller Orchestra [USA] directed by Nick Hilscher.

Sept 3, Sam's Town Casino, Las Vegas, NV; Sept 17, Walnut High School Performing Arts Center, Walnut, CA (two shows); Sept 19, West Ranch High School Theater, Stevenson Ranch, CA; Sept 21, Hanford Fox Theatre, Hanford, CA; Sept 24, Capitol Theatre, Salt Lake City, UT; Sept 26, Desert Hills High School, St. George, UT; Sept 28, Fort Hall Casino, Fort Hall, ID; Sept 30, WYO Theatre, Sheridan, WY.

Glenn Miller Orchestra [UK] directed by Ray McVay.

Sept 5, “Big Band Show Break,” Potters Resort; Sept 11, Milton Keynes Theatre, Milton Keynes; Sept 18, Wycombe Swan, High Wycombe; Sept 24, The Mill At Sonning, Sonning; Sept 25, Wyvem Theatre, Swindon.

Glenn Miller Orchestra [Scandinavia] directed by Jan Slottenas.

Sept 4, Spira, Jonkoping; Sept 25, Concert Hall, Gavle.

Glenn Miller Orchestra [Europe] directed by Wil Salden.

Sept 24, Sauerland-Theater, Arnsberg; Sept 25, Kulturezentrum, Rathenow; Sept 26, Congress Centrum, Suhl; Sept 27, Stadttheater, Peine; Sept 30, Audimax der Hochschule, Hildesheim.

Glenn Miller Orchestra [Australia, Mexico] directed by Rick Gerber.

