

THE PITTSBURGH CONCERT CHORALE
POPS CONCERT: BIG BAND
PROGRAM NOTES

From 1925-1955 the Big Band Era in American popular music flourished. Fletcher Henderson started a dance band in New York City in the 1920s which initially played waltzes and foxtrots. That soon gave way to jazz influences with jazz rhythms and blue notes. His band played the Roseland Ballroom and featured Louis Armstrong on trumpet. In 1928 he began arranging music in the style which became known as the "big band" style. Duke Ellington, a classically-trained musician, started a dance band in the '20s which became known as a great jazz band in its Harlem home, the Cotton Club. Chick Webb also started his own band in the '20s and, when the Savoy opened in 1926, was its featured act. In 1934 he hired Ella Fitzgerald as his "girl singer."

The distinctive sound of Swing bands generally is considered to be from around 1935-1946 when its danceable swing style was the dominant form of American popular music. Swing jazz, or simply swing, uses a strong rhythm section of double bass and drums as the anchor for a lead section of brass instruments such as trumpets, and trombones, woodwinds including saxophones and clarinets, and sometimes stringed instruments such as violin and guitar, medium to fast tempos, and a "lilting" swing time rhythm. Swing bands usually featured soloists who would improvise on the melody over the arrangement

Swing really took off in 1935 when Benny Goodman's band, using many of Fletcher Henderson's arrangements, played the Palomar Ballroom in Los Angeles, California, and brought the music to the rest of the nation through radio broadcasts. In January 1938 Goodman's band played the first jazz concert ever in Carnegie Hall, a landmark event which recognized the popularity and importance of this style of music. There were many great musicians during the Big Band Era, including the Dorsey brothers, Glenn Miller, Count Basie, Earl Hines, Artie Shaw, Jimmie Lunceford, Les Brown, Harry James, and Gene Krupa, with over 50 nationally-recognized big bands during World War II.

It Don't Mean a Thing (If It Ain't Got that Swing)

"It Don't Mean a Thing (If It Ain't Got that Swing)" was written in 1931 by Duke Ellington, who first recorded it in February 1932 with his orchestra. It is probably the first song to use the phrase "swing" in the title, introducing the term into everyday language about three years before the swing era. The Ellington band recorded the song numerous times. Glenn Miller's favorite quote was Ellington's "It don't mean a thing if it ain't got that swing."

Accentuate the Positive

Written in 1944, "Accentuate the Positive" was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Original Song after being used in the 1945 film *Here Come the Waves*. Johnny Mercer recorded the song with the Pied Piper and Paul Weston's Orchestra in October 1944. Within five months several other recordings followed, featuring Bing Crosby and the Andrews Sisters, Kay Kyser, Dinah Washington and Lionel Hampton, and Artie Shaw. In 2014 the Johnny Mercer version was inducted into the Library of Congress's National Recording Registry for the song's "cultural, artistic and/or historical significance to American society and the nation's audio legacy".

Mood Indigo

Written for a radio broadcast in October 1930 by Duke Ellington, the original title of this song was "Dreamy Blues." Ellington said that it was the first tune he ever wrote specially for microphone transmission. The song was extremely well-received after that first broadcast, so Irving Mills wrote lyrics for it. Renamed "Mood Indigo," the song became a jazz standard.

Moonlight Cocktail

"Moonlight Cocktail" was recorded by Glenn Miller and His Orchestra on December 8, 1941, the day after the attack on Pearl Harbor. It was released in January 1942, and for ten weeks between February and May 1942 it was the best-selling record in the United States. It ended the year as the number 2 seller, behind Bing Crosby's "White Christmas."

Don't Sit Under the Apple Tree

"Don't Sit Under the Apple Tree" was originally titled "Anywhere the Bluebird Goes" for the 1939 Broadway musical *Yokel Boy*. The lyrics were modified to their current form by Brown and Tobias when the United States entered World War II. In 1942 the song was so popular that recordings by Glenn Miller, Kay Kyser, and the Andrews Sisters were all on the radio hit parade at the same time, one of the few songs in history to achieve that distinction.

Take the A Train

The signature tune of the Duke Ellington Orchestra, "Take the A Train" was composed by Pittsburgher Billy Strayhorn in 1939. The title refers to the then-new A subway service that runs through New York City, going at that time from eastern Brooklyn up into Harlem and northern Manhattan. Ellington had offered Strayhorn a job in his organization and gave him money to travel from Pittsburgh to New York City. Ellington wrote directions for Strayhorn to get to his house by subway, directions that began, "Take the A Train." The legendary song was first recorded in 1941.

As Time Goes By

"As Time Goes By" was written in 1931 by Herman Hupfeld for the Broadway musical *Everybody's Welcome*. It was recorded by several artists, including Rudy Vallee, and became a modest hit. In 1942 it was featured in the film *Casablanca*. The American Film Institute listed it as its number two song in their list of the 100 best songs in film.

Blue Moon

"Blue Moon" was initially written by Richard Rodgers and Lorenz Hart while they were under contract to MGM in 1933. The music was set to three different sets of lyrics as movie songs, but none of the songs was very successful. MGM decided the tune was suitable for commercial release but needed more romantic lyrics. Rodgers was persuaded to write a fourth set of lyrics which became a hit.

I've Got a Gal in Kalamazoo

"I've Got a Gal in Kalamazoo" was a #1 song for 8 weeks according to *Billboard* in 1942 when it was recorded by Glenn Miller's band. It was featured in the movie *Orchestra Wives* and was nominated for an Academy Award for "Best Music, Original Song" in 1943. It is played during pre-games by the Western Michigan University marching band.

Jukebox Saturday Night

“Jukebox Saturday Night” was recorded by Glenn Miller and his Orchestra in 1942. Soda fountains became popular in the 1930s and 1940s as places where teenagers could gather and play music on jukeboxes. Glenn Miller’s hit recounts a wild party at a soda and ice cream fountain. The song’s lyrics reference the other artists that composed the party’s soundtrack, and it includes solos and choruses lifted directly from Harry James and the Ink Spots.

Sing, Sing, Sing (With a Swing)

“Sing, Sing, Sing (With A Swing)” was written in 1936 by Louis Prima and recorded by him with the New Orleans Gang in March of that year. It is strongly identified with the Swing era and was covered most famously by Benny Goodman who felt that “no one-nighter was complete without it.”

It Happened in Sun Valley

“It Happened in Sun Valley” was performed by Glenn Miller and His Orchestra in the movie *Sun Valley Serenade*. As a tie-in with the movie, Miller released a recording of the song in 1941. Because of its winter theme, “It Happened in Sun Valley” has come to be associated with Christmas. So much so, in fact, that it has been recorded on the holiday albums of a number of artists including Mel Tormé and Jo Stafford. It was even featured in the 1999 “Mr. Hankey’s Christmas Classics” episode of the animated television show *South Park*. That’s quite a contrast from a 1941 film!

More Than You Know

Published in 1929, “More Than You Know” was introduced in the Broadway musical *Great Day*. It later appeared in three musical films, *Hit the Deck* (1955), sung by Tony Martin, *Funny Lady* (1975), sung by Barbra Streisand, and *The Fabulous Baker Boys* (1999), sung by Michelle Pfeiffer. “More Than You Know” has been recorded by countless artists, including Jimmy Dorsey, Tommy Dorsey, Benny Goodman, Count Basie and his orchestra, Pat Boone, Ann-Margret, Rosemary Clooney, Cher, Frank Sinatra, Andy Williams, and Patti Page.

Standing on the Corner

Technically “Standing on the Corner” is not a song from the Big Band era, but it’s a great tune anyway. It was written in 1956 for the Broadway musical *The Most Happy Fella*. The version the men of the Pittsburgh Concert Chorale are performing was recorded by Dean Martin with Dick Stabile and His Orchestra and Chorus in 1956.

Pennsylvania 6-5000

Glenn Miller and His Orchestra recorded the hit “Pennsylvania 6-5000” in 1940. The title refers to the telephone number of New York City’s Hotel Pennsylvania. The hotel’s Café Rouge was a popular performance venue for many big bands at the time. Miller’s tune became a jazz and big band standard and was recorded by the Andrews Sisters, Judy Garland and Martha Raye, the Brian Setzer Orchestra, and many other artists. Even an episode of *The Muppets* featured the song, performed by Bobby Benson and the Baby Band.

Moonlight Serenade

"Moonlight Serenade" was Glenn Miller's signature tune. It was released in 1939 as an instrumental arrangement and lyrics were subsequently written by Mitchell Parish. It was the #5 top pop hit of 1939 for Billboard, one of five records that Miller had in the top 20 list that year.

The Pennsylvania Polka

The Andrews Sisters recorded "The Pennsylvania Polka" in 1942 for their film *Give Out, Sisters*. It was not a big success at first, but over the years the song gained in popularity. It is now considered one of their most popular songs. The women of the Pittsburgh Concert Chorale will take you back to the days of Patty, Maxine, and LaVerne with their performance of this Andrews Sisters hit.

In the Mood

"In the Mood" was recorded as an instrumental by Glenn Miller and his Orchestra in 1939. This recording is considered to be one of the most recognized and most popular instrumentals of the 20th century. In 1999, National Public Radio included it on its list of "The 100 most important American musical works of the 20th century." "In the Mood" was based on a pre-existing melody, "Tar Paper Stomp" credited to jazz trumpeter/bandleader Wingy Manone. The same tune was then used in "Hot and Anxious" by The Fletcher Henderson Orchestra. Under the copyright rules of that time, a tune that had not been written down and registered with the copyright office could be used by any musician. It was thought that Miller paid Manone for the tune once "In the Mood" became a hit.

Chattanooga Choo Choo

"Chattanooga Choo Choo" was performed as an extended production number in the 1941 film *Sun Valley Serenade* by Glenn Miller and his Orchestra. It was nominated for a 1941 Academy Award for Best Song and was the #1 song for nine weeks on Billboard. The 78-rpm record was the first certified gold disc with sales of 1,200,000.

Come Rain or Come Shine

Written for the musical *St. Louis Woman*, "Come Rain or Come Shine" was first published in 1946. In that year alone, recordings were made by Sy Oliver with the Tommy Dorsey Orchestra, Dinah Shore, Helen Forrest and Dick Haymes, Margaret Whiting, and Ray Charles. Despite not making the charts when it first appeared, "Come Rain or Come Shine" has become a standard. It has been recorded numerous times in every decade since the 1940s by artists as varied as Frank Sinatra, Marlene Dietrich, Judy Garland, Barbra Streisand, Perry Como, Bette Midler, Willie Nelson, and Bob Dylan.