



THE GREAT ESCAPE!*

***“Anything that is good jazz is a great escape. When you’re involved in playing or listening to great jazz, no one can get to you.” -Woody Herman**

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Quotable Jazzmen: The Bandleaders

By Bob Knack©

Big band era leaders were not only great showmen and/or businessmen they were outspoken, as well. Let us consider a few of those men who led the big outfits back in the day, who had something piquant to say about virtually everything.

Many of the early big bands played strictly for the dancers...that’s where the money was. Artie Shaw, though, didn’t care for the jitter-buggers. “You can dance to a windshield wiper,” groused the clarinetist, “A windshield wiper...gives you a beat and all you need is an out-of-tune playing ‘Melancholy Baby’ and you’ve got dance music.” However, Lawrence Welk, who made millions from the hoofers both in ballrooms and on TV countered with, “If they can’t hum it after we play it, it’s not for us.”

Fred Waring along with his band, The Pennsylvanians, also cleaned up on the dancers. He made enough loot to invest heavily in the food processor named after him. Fred would issue this pre-concert warning to his popular dance band, “Be on your toes tonight - or I’ll be on yours tomorrow.” Incidentally, the Waring blender first appeared in 1937. The bandleader wanted to be able to liquefy veggies for his prescribed ulcer diet.

However, how did leaders feel about playing Jazz? Stan Kenton, whose band was musically among the most innovative, commented, “Whenever you play dance music, it serves a function. It becomes a utility; you have to worry about the tempos and what you’re going to play for people. But when you’re playing for listening, you’re free.” Duke Ellington, the bandleader’s bandleader, once was heard to say, “By and large, jazz has always been like the kind of a man you wouldn’t want your daughter to associate with”. Count Basie added, “I, of course, wanted to play real jazz. When we played pop tunes, and naturally, we had to, I wanted those pops to kick! Not loud and fast, understand, but smoothly and with a definite punch.”

Most leaders adored playing for the fans. Tommy Dorsey once cautioned his band, “Boys, the crowd paid \$1.25 to get in here tonight, let’s give ‘em \$2.50’s worth.” According to Peter Levinson’s new

book on Dorsey, “Living in a Great Big Way,” before beginning a set, TD would often look up at his boys and say, “Get ready to play big league ball”.

Although another trombone-playing leader, Glenn Miller, along with Dorsey, enjoyed fronting their bands, they were both recognized as tough businessmen. “Don’t judge me as a musician,” said Miller, whose first job as a boy was milking a cow for just pennies, “All I’m interested in is making money.” Glenn, who knew his audience admonished, “I haven’t a great jazz band, and I don’t want one.” During the war years, Dorsey added a string section to a band that as it grew to forty-six musicians was called “The Big Bertha Band”. “I wish you wouldn’t make the strings such an important part of your arrangements”, he told one of his writers, “Because frankly they’re only a tax dodge!” Shaw did not subscribe to the same philosophy: “There’s such a cynicism about the phrase, ‘I laughed all the way to the bank.’ It’s as though money is what you’re doing, rather than playing music. If you’re playing a money game, why not get into banking?”

In addition, during the war years and beyond, the bands not only grew in size but personnel changed frequently. The often absent-minded Benny Goodman was unable to remember the names of his sidemen and mostly referred to everyone as “Pops”. Johnny Guarneri remembering his time with BG said, “When I first joined Benny, he called me ‘Fletcher’ for three months before he could remember my name.” Later on, Woody Herman, suffering a mental block one night as he spun around to introduce Nat Pierce, his pianist, blurted out, “How about a nice hand for Mary Lou Williams!”

As said, Shaw didn’t enjoy interacting with his fans. “I can’t understand these guys who just have to have your autograph, complained the man they called the “King of Clarinet, “I asked one of them ‘What do you do when you get home, take it out and look at it?’” Artie did enjoy some forms of human interaction. He had eight wives including actresses Lana Turner, Ava Gardner, Evelyn Keyes and novelist Kathleen Winsor. About this he commented, “You have no idea of the women I didn’t marry.” Not to be outdone,

Charlie Barnett said of his eleven marriages: "I like the girls to match the upholstery of the car." He was forced to write many tunes under the pseudonym of Dale Bennett to hide money from the many former Mrs. Barnetts.

Les Brown that "man of renown" whose band was so clean cut and wholesome they were known as "the milk shake band", once advised, "Shoot for the moon. Even if you miss, you'll land among the stars." The band recorded "I've Got My Love to Keep Me Warm" in the early forties but it gathered dust on the

shelf. Some years later, needing a closing number, Les pulled the chart from the back of the book and played it again on a Bob Hope radio show. The audience reaction was so huge, Columbia Records called and requested he immediately come in and record it. "Look in your vault", advised Les, it's already in there." Maybe he had Columbia executives in mind when he said. "Someone's sitting in the shade today because someone else planted a tree a long time ago."



Tasty Big Band Tid-Bits

By Bob Knack©

I learned some interesting things while looking up some other interesting things:

Much of Benny Goodman's early success came in the Urban Room of downtown Chicago's Congress Hotel. The engagement was supposed to be for three weeks but turned into several months. Monday night was an off night for Benny but the music continued with Bill Hogan's band. That group featured Richard Maltby on lead trumpet, who would later write only one chart for Benny. The tune, "Six Flats Unfurnished", was unusual in that Goodman didn't get a solo. Maybe that's why BG didn't let him do another one.

As just about everybody knows, Woody Herman's first big hit was "Woodchoppers Ball", recorded on April 12, 1939. However, who remembers the flip side of that Decca 78 RPM?

It was "Big Wig in the Wigwam" and was the first vocal featuring Mary Ann McCall with the herd. Contrary to popular belief, "Woodchoppers Ball" was not named for Herman, the old woodchopper. Walt Yoder, the bands bass player, attended a wood chopping contest in the Boston Garden. He came back with the title to apply to their latest "head" arrangement.

Here's a Toast: To All the Girls We've Loved Before...

Brigitte Bardot 71	Stella Stevens 68
Sophia Loren 71	Gina Lollobrigida 78
Deborah Kerr 94	Lena Horne 88
Kay Starr 83	Patti Page 78
Annette Funicello 63	Barbara Eden 71
Angie Dickenson 74	Doris Day 81
Joan Collins 72	Julie Christie 64
Carroll Baker 74	Ann-Margret 64
Debra Padget 72	Julie Andrews 70
Ursula Andress 69	Rita Moreno 74
Jean Simmons 76	Julie Newmar 72
Kim Novak 72	Jane Powell 76
Debbie Reynolds 73	Shirley Temple 77
Jane Russell 84	Esther Williams 82
Elke Sommer 65	Gale Storm 83
Jill St John 65	Liz Taylor 73
Mamie Van Doren 74	

UNBELIEVABLE.... HOW IN THE WORLD DID THEY AGE, AND WE DIDN'T?

Recommended Chicagoland Happenings...

The Brookfield Jazz Society meets every Thursday in the Cottage at Irish Times, 8869 Burlington Avenue, Brookfield, Illinois (708) 268-7873, with live jazz and other happenings. www.brookfieldjazz.org

"The Browsers", experts in the big band era, meet the last Friday of every month @ the Villa D'Oro Restaurant, 5531 N. Milwaukee Avenue, Chicago, Illinois, and (773) 775-2820. Dues are six dollars and include a share of the pizza.

Disc Jockey "Rowdy" Ron Richter plays big band and jazz the second Sunday of every month at Matty's Wayside Inn, 1727 Waukegan Road, Glenview, Illinois, in the lounge. (847) 724-1314 at 4:00 PM - ? Attendees are invited to bring a favorite CD of the genre to play and comment on.

The Illiana Club of Traditional Jazz presents excellent concerts monthly at the Glendora Ballroom, 10225 S. Harlem Avenue, Chicago Ridge, Illinois.

On the Radio: **"Mike Baker and the Forgotten 45's"**: Saturday evenings from 6 PM during the summer months on WJGG-AM 1530, Elmhurst, Illinois. www.wjggam1530.com

Chicago Memories

By Browser Warren Ketter

Reprinted from Browser Notes # 64

We made a trip to Andy Anderson's Chateau Ballroom, located on the second floor of a building on the corner of Grace and Broadway. The lure was Woody Herman's newly formed band playing one of their first one-nighters. When Isham Jones broke up his fine band, enterprising Woody formed a co-op group that included some choice sidemen from the Jones band. This band had a big sound, carrying the tag, The Band That Plays the Blues, which they did.

My good friend, George Grueff and myself spent a couple of nights a week at the dome in the Sherman Hotel. The attraction was Joe Marsala and his group. Joe's brother, Marty, played the trumpet and Joe's wife, Adele, played the harp. The drummer was Davey Tough. The sound of the harp in the group was very pleasant to the ear and watching Davey Tough was a joy. After each set of music, some of the musicians would sit at the bar, where we became acquainted. Off the stand, Tough was congenial; however not very talkative.

In the 1930's, on fall nights, some of us would hangout at the walkathon contests held at the Arcadia. The Arcadia was located on Broadway

between Montrose and Wilson. In the evening, music for the contestants was furnished by violinist Erskine Tate and his group. Erskine would call out to the audience, "Who Plays the Best?" and the crowd would respond loudly "Erskine Tate!" At various times the band included some top-notch musicians. Written accounts of the walkathons refer to Anita O'Day and Frankie Laine as competing participants, but I don't recall seeing either of them.* The star attraction for us was the comedic antics of Sir Richard Buckley. Dick was at the start of his riotous show business career. He would climb the grid work of the Arcadia to the very top of the ceiling supports, where one misstep could be fatal. Nothing seemed to faze Lord Buckley. He would do anything to electrify the customers. As Carroll O'Connor phrased it so wisely, "Those Were the Days".

***Ed. note: Warren may have been thinking of the Merry Garden Ballroom at 3136 North Sheffield Avenue where Frankie sang and danced with Anita when she was only 14.**



Still Browsin' After All These Years

The Browsers, experts in the big band era, were the creators of an ABC Network big band radio trivia program, hosted by radio legend Eddie Hubbard for 22 years. They also produced a newsletter through most of that period. Some were big band

singers or instrumentalists, a few were radio/TV people or journalists. Many were merely passionate fans of that great music and devoted record collectors: Regrettably, some are no longer with us.

What is a Browser?

By Phil Holdman

Reprinted From Browsers Notes #3

A Browser comes in all shapes, sizes and colors.

To become eligible, they must know the difference between The Pied Pipers and the New Kids on the Block and have a huge record collection of the music of the 30's 40's and 50's.

A Browser need not have a college degree, but must know the names of the universities attended by Ozzie Nelson, Johnny Long, Kay Kyser and Hal Kemp.

A Browser usually has a favorite band, whether it is sweet or swing. He also, usually hates certain bands that another Browser might idolize. (This causes some hectic debates at our monthly meetings) Nevertheless, it's a healthy situation because much of the material for our radio shows comes from these discussions.

Some Browsers made their living in the music field-other Browsers paid money to see and hear those pro's before they joined our group.

The name Browsers was coined by my wife Alberta, who once said, "Why don't you call yourselves The Browsers; you're always browsing in record shops looking for things to add to your collection."

She also said, "That's enough, there's no more room in our house."

Anyway, it's been a lot of fun and you'll never meet a greater bunch of guys, even though some prefer Sammy Kaye over Count Basie.

Long live the Browsers—

Ed. note: We will salute the group with a list of all known members in our next issue



Remembering “Liltin” Martha Tilton

According to George T. Simon, in his 1967 tome "The Big Bands," Martha Tilton was "a young, pretty and effervescent lass" during her days with the Jimmy Dorsey band. Tilton, Born Nov. 14, 1915, in Corpus Christi, Texas, passed away on December 6, 2006. She was 91.

She got her start singing on a small radio station in Los Angeles while attending Fairfax High School. An agent who heard her inked her to a contract and soon Tilton moved on to bigger shows on bigger stations. She dropped out of school in the 11th grade to join Hal Grayson's band and toured the West Coast with that aggregation for a couple of years.



Martha joined the Jimmy Dorsey Orchestra in 1937 but never made a record with the band. Later, she was part of a quartet called "Three Hits and a Miss," and was on Benny Goodman's "Camel Caravan" radio show in 1937 when the bandleader hired her as vocalist, replacing Helen Ward. Before he found Martha, many singers not meeting the leaders' expectations passed through the band, Margaret McCrae, Frances Hunt, Peg LaCentra and Betty Van. Tilton made over 80 recordings with BG, including one of her biggest, "And the Angels Sing". Before she joined Goodman, the band was recording about one-third vocals, but 50 per cent afterward. According to her fan site, www.marthatilton.com. At the beginning of her stint with Goodman, she was singing at the Sunnybrook Ballroom in Pottstown, Pennsylvania. When it came time for Benny to

introduce her, he gave her a big buildup: "Here is a pretty gal from Hollywood that's really going places." However, Martha missed her cue, and did not immediately appear on stage. To this Benny quipped, "Boy, she's not going places, she's already gone."

When Martha was 23 years old, she and the Goodman band made history when it performed the first-ever jazz concert at Carnegie Hall in 1938 with the vocalist performing a rollicking version of "Loch Lomond". In 1955, the film "The Benny Goodman Story" debuted with Steve Allen playing Goodman, "The King of Swing". Tilton played herself in the flick singing "And the Angels Sing" in the Carnegie Hall scene. Ironically, she did not sing that tune at the actual concert. This was not her first movie. In 1937, she appeared in "Topper," with Roland Young, Cary Grant and Constance Bennett. She was unbilled as a lounge singer, fronting the group "Three Hits and a Miss." She also appeared in the films "Irene," "You'll Never Get Rich," "Sunny," "Strictly In The Groove," "Crime Inc. "and" Swing Hostess". Her last movie, "The Queen of the Stardust Ballroom," was made in 1975.

In 1939, Tilton left Goodman to get out on her own.

Martha also sang briefly with Artie Shaw, and recorded only one tune with his band, "Dreamin' Out Loud." She was the first singer signed by Johnny Mercer to record for Capitol Records in 1942, where for the first time; she was able to select her own material. Among her biggest hits were "A Stranger in Town," "I Should Care," "I'll Walk Alone," "I Wonder, I Wonder, I Wonder," "A Fine Romance," "Connecticut," and "I'll Remember April" which Martha said was her favorite recording.

Tilton made guest shots on many radio programs in the '40s and was vocalist with the Billy Mills orchestra on the "Fibber McGee and Molly" show. She hosted her own radio show on NBC, "Liltin' Martha Tilton Time." This is where her famous nickname originated and stuck. During World War II, Tilton appeared in a pair of USO tours with Jack Benny — to the South Pacific in 1944 and the following year to Germany.



Mission Statement

This newsletter, created by Bob Knack and friends, remembers The Browsers on the ABC network, Bob's radio shows on WJG-AM 1530, Elmhurst, Illinois; and contains articles for all aficionados of big band, swing and traditional jazz worldwide. It is an attempt to fill the void left when periodicals such as the Browser's Notes ceased to publish. We will concentrate on, but will not be limited to, fun-to-read articles on the music from "back in the day". Initially, we intend to publish as an E-letter only. Letters, articles, suggestions or any help whatsoever is appreciated. Send inquiries to bobknack@hotmail.com or PO Box 642012, Chicago, Illinois 60664 "We're retro because everything old is better!"