

Glenn Miller's music still gets air time

SHELLEY MIKA
Staff writer

Editor's note: In this weekly series, we explore the lives and works of notable Nebraska artists of the 20th century.

Imagine hearing "Smells Like Teen Spirit" while looking for milk in the grocery store. It probably sounds like a strange scenario.

But think about how popular Nirvana was. Who knows, in decades to come you could hear Nirvana on space-age Muzak while choosing your favorite dehydrated lunch pill.

But let's talk about the here and now.

There's a little tune by a big band called "In the Mood," and yes, you've probably heard it while choosing between skim and 2 percent milk.

If that doesn't ring a bell, then maybe you'll recall another ditty by the name of "Chattanooga Choo-choo."

If not, let it be said that Glenn Miller, the man responsible for both, continues to get airplay more than 50 years after his prime.

Alton Glenn Miller was born in Clarinda, Iowa, on March 1, 1904. Five years later, Miller's family moved to Tryon, Neb., where it lived in a sod hut.

Later, the family moved to North Platte, where Miller's father worked at the time.

It was here in Nebraska where Glenn got his first instrument, the mandolin. But that didn't last long. Glenn had his sights set on the trombone. Much to the chagrin of his parents, Miller traded his mandolin for an old, beat-up horn.

Miller's older brother, Dean, could very well be

responsible for getting Miller started in his career. Dean often the trumpet in a local band. Often, Miller would follow his brother to rehearsals. Seeing Miller's drive and promise as a trombonist, the band leader gave him a shiny, new trombone. Miller was enthusiastic enough to pay the band-leader back by shining shoes in his store.

Miller's enthusiasm for playing remained, although it did not carry over into his college career. At the University of Colorado, Miller played trombone in a band led by student Holly Moyer while failing a first-year harmony course.

Apparently, Miller's focus was to play music instead of simply studying it. That same year, Miller began to try his hand at arranging.

Over the next decade, Miller performed as both an instrumentalist and an arranger in several groups, most of which were theater and recording bands and radio orchestras. But the security

of contract and studio work wasn't enough for Miller to stay in this position. He wanted to lead his own band.

In 1937, he got his wish. But despite Miller's hard work, talent and patience, the group was going nowhere commercially. In 1938, Miller gave it another try. That September, the new version of his band was signed to Victor RCA, and by the next spring, the band had risen to fame. In addition to a group of talented musicians and Miller's perfectionism, Miller's arranging technique earned the attention of critics and listeners.

Conrad Good,

host of "Dance Bands: When Melody Was King" on KZUM-FM (89.3), said Miller's arranging style "was originally a mistake. He was trying for an arrangement, and the saxophone couldn't hit the high note."

Instead, Miller used the clarinet section to carry the melody, and the saxophones harmonized underneath.

Don Gill, host of "Big Band Spotlight" on Nebraska Public Radio, said, "The Miller sound was bigger and more enhanced" than the other bands of the time.

Tom Larson, a jazz history professor, said, "They were really a commercial band that had a really good swing concept."

By 1940, the "Miller sound" was a huge success. In that same year, the band's biggest hit, "In the Mood," was released. After a few short years of fame, Miller's patriotic spirit led him to join the World War II effort. Although originally Miller hadn't joined the service to

take his band across the seas, that's exactly what happened.

In 1942, Miller hand-picked enlisted swing musicians and formed a service band. This new group played 800 performances a year. For the majority of the war, Miller's band was stationed in England. But after the liberation of France, Miller and his band were scheduled to transfer to Paris.

But Miller never made it. On Dec. 15, 1944, the small plane that was to take him to Paris disappeared. There are several theories regarding Miller's disappearance.

One conspiracy theory asserts that there was no plane and that Miller actually died in a Paris brothel of a heart condition.

But Gill said the theory "has been pretty well ruled out by everybody."

Until recently, the most accepted theory was simply that the plane's wings iced over, and it was lost over the English Channel.

But in the last year, a member of the Royal Air Force of Britain admitted he had been flying a bomber on the same day at the same time and place where Miller's plane went down. The officer's bombing mission had been aborted, and he was ordered to release his bombs over the English Channel in order to land.

As he did so, he said, he noticed a small plane underneath, which is assumed to have been Miller's plane.

Instead of headlines in the Enquirer about

Miller's death, he is remembered today for his music.

Recently, the highway between Tryon and North Platte was dedicated to him. Clarinda, Iowa has an annual festival celebrating Miller's music with bands from all over the world. And of course, the Glenn Miller Orchestra still plays today.

"He was really the biggest name of the dance bands," Gill said.



World-renowned orchestra to perform at Lied Center

BY DANELL MCCOY
Staff writer

Recognized as one of the finest orchestras in the world, the National Symphony Orchestra performs almost 175 concerts a year.

On Monday, the symphony will make a stop in Lincoln to perform at the Lied Center for Performing Arts at 301 N. 12th St.

The National Symphony Orchestra, now in its 69th season, has regularly performed for presidential inaugurations and has traveled to four continents, developing an acclaimed international reputation.

Although it wasn't until 1986 that the symphony became officially affiliated with the John F. Kennedy Center for Performing Arts in Washington, D.C., the symphony had been associated with it since the center opened in 1971. The orchestra performs its regular concert season there.

The 100-member National Symphony Orchestra dedicates itself to promoting the works of American composers, both old and new. The symphony also uses its influence to expand musical appreciation within the United States with an educational program that serves almost 40,000 students each year.

The music director, Leonard Slatkin, has worked to bring the National Symphony Orchestra to new heights.

Though he is only the fifth director the orchestra has had, the pairing of Slatkin with

Lied Center The Facts

What: National Symphony Orchestra
Where: Lied Center for Performing Arts
When: Monday 8 p.m.
Cost: \$44, \$40, \$36, half-price for students
The Skinny: Symphony celebrates American composers, both old and new.

the symphony has garnered a Grammy for Best Classical Album for their first recording and a nomination for their second.

Slatkin previously appeared at the Lied Center in 1991, 1993 and 1995 when he directed the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra. He also serves as guest conductor of London's Philharmonia Orchestra.

Slatkin studied at the Juilliard School of Music and has more than 100 recordings with various orchestras. Five of these recordings resulted in Grammy Awards, while 50 others have received nominations for the award.

Pre-performance talks will be held in the Lied Center's Steinhart Room as a part of its ongoing educational program. The talks will be held 55 and 30 minutes prior to performance and are free to the public.

Tickets to the 8 p.m. performance are \$44, \$40 and \$36, and student tickets are half price.

Program helps students meet working writers

BY JASON HARDY
Senior staff writer

Depending on their majors, some students at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln can easily find examples of people working in their future career.

Medical students can go to a hospital and talk to a doctor, architecture students can stop in at one of Lincoln's firms and see a working architect and for business majors, well, that's about the easiest one of all. Business is booming.

But for student artists, a tangible representative of their future goals is much more elusive. Sure, examples of their work may be readily available, but because of art's personal nature, interacting with successful and working artists is somewhat of a rarity.

Luckily for students of creative writing, the Department of English and the Creative Writing Program are aware of that fact. To dispel some of the mystery behind being a working writer, the departments have continuously invited writers to visit UNL students.

Tonight at 7:30, in 228 Andrews Hall, the Department of English and the Creative Writing Program are presenting a free reading by Thisbe Nissen, a recent graduate of the Iowa Writers' Workshop and author of "Out of the Girls' Room and Into the Night," a collection of short stories that won the 1999 John Simmons Short Fiction Award from the University of Iowa Press.

Nissen, who has also been featured in *Story* magazine, *Seventeen*, *The New Orleans Review* and other journals, will read from her collection

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GRACE BAUER
associate professor of English

of short stories, answer questions from the audience and sign books.

Grace Bauer, an associate professor of English at UNL, said meeting people such as Nissen in person can be very helpful for prospective writers.

"I think it's always important for students who are seriously considering pursuing writing as a career certainly to read other writers but to meet them as well," she said. "Generally, the students who do come to the readings find it very helpful."

Bauer said Nissen, who graduated in 1997, was a good example for students to see because she is a talented and successful writer, and she is still very young, further enabling her to identify with students.

Also, because writers must be both artists and marketers, Bauer said, it was good for students to see how professionals sell their art.

"I think it's very important to sort of ask writers about their creative process," Bauer said, "but also about publishing to understand both the creative and practical aspects of a career in writing."