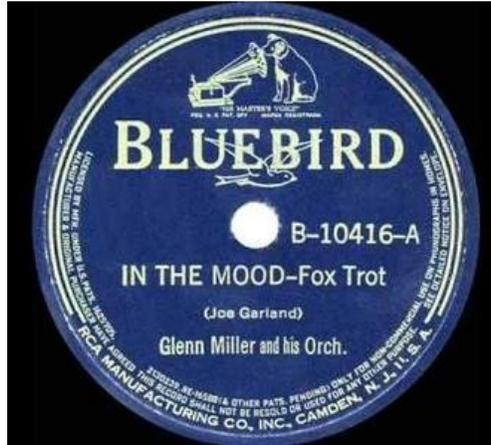


# “In the Mood”--Glenn Miller and His Orchestra (1939)

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Essay by Dennis M. Spragg (guest post)\*



## *“The Anthem of the Swing Era”*

On August 1, 1939, Glenn Miller and his Orchestra recorded the Joe Garland composition “In the Mood” for RCA Bluebird records. It became a top-selling record that would be permanently associated with Miller and which has become the easily recognized “anthem of the swing era.” “In the Mood” appears to have been inspired by several earlier works from which the tune was developed. Once composed, it remained a “work in progress” until recorded by Miller.

The first indication of a composition with elements resembling what would become “In the Mood” was “Clarinet Getaway,” recorded by the Jimmy O’Bryant Washboard Wonders in 1925 for Paramount records. It is matrix number P-2148 and was issued as Paramount 12287. It was paired with a tune titled “Back Alley Rub.” The recording was made by a four-piece band with Arkansas native O’Bryant playing clarinet and accompanied by a piano, cornet and washboard player. Following O’Bryant, similar themes were evident in the Wingy Manone recording of “Tar Paper Stomp.” Manone’s recording is considered the genesis of “In the Mood” by most jazz historians. The recording is by Barbeque Joe and his Hot Dogs, the name under which Manone recorded at the time. Manone recorded “Tar Paper Stomp” on August 28, 1930, for the Champion label (which was acquired by Decca in 1935). Reissues credit the record to Wingy Manone and his Orchestra. It is matrix number G16951 and was issued as Champion 16153. The tune was paired with “Tin Roof Blues,” which Manone recorded on September 19, 1930.

Fletcher Henderson led the most popular African-American orchestra of the 1920s and early 1930s. He recorded elements of the “riff” heard in “Tar Paper Stomp” as “Hot and Anxious” for Columbia on March 19, 1931. This is matrix W 151443-1 and was issued as Columbia 2449D. It was composed and arranged by Fletcher Henderson’s brother Horace. Don Redman and his Orchestra also recorded “Hot and Anxious,” for Brunswick on June 28, 1932. This is matrix B 12006-A and was issued as Brunswick 6368 (Redman had played saxophone for Fletcher Henderson). There is “scat” singing to be heard on the Redman piece, but no lyrics per se.

Saxophone player Joe Garland wrote arrangements and played in the saxophone section for the Mills Blue Rhythm Band, which Lucky Millinder led and Irving Mills financed. Garland composed and arranged a tune that he titled “There’s Rhythm in Harlem” for this band, which also included J. C. Higginbotham, trombone; Henry “Red” Allen, trumpet, and Edgar Hayes, piano. Garland’s composition was recorded July 9, 1935 for Columbia. It is matrix number CO

17797-1 and was issued as Columbia 3071D. The flip side of the record is “Harlem Heat” recorded July 2, 1935.

When Edgar Hayes formed his own band, Garland went with him. Garland composed and arranged the work that we now essentially know to be “In the Mood.” Edgar Hayes and his Orchestra recorded it for Decca records on February 17, 1938. It is matrix number 63297-A and was released as Decca 1882-B. The flip side of the record is “Star Dust,” which Hayes recorded at the same session. Prior to the Hayes recording, only brief glimpses of the “riff” which would become familiar with “In the Mood” can be heard. The Hayes recording is the first completely recognizable version of the future hit tune. On March 16, 1938, Joe Marsala and his Chicagoans jumped into the picture with a recording titled “Hot String Beans,” which featured a young Buddy Rich on drums. Although played at a much slower tempo, this tune bears a resemblance to Joe Garland’s “In the Mood” and a future adaptation by Artie Shaw and Jerry Gray. This is matrix number M781 and was issued as Vocalion 4168. At the time of the Hayes recording, Lyricist Andy Razaf added lyrics, a common practice of the time. Razaf was a protégé of Thomas “Fats” Waller, and he also wrote the lyrics for such Waller hits as “Ain’t Misbehavin’” and “Honeysuckle Rose.”

Joe Garland copyrighted “In the Mood” in June 1938, but the tune languished, and he offered to sell it to white bandleaders. Artie Shaw purchased the composition circa November 1938. Shaw chose to handle it initially as a lengthy six-minute instrumental arrangement worked out by arranger Jerry Gray (Generoso Graziano). The Shaw version was written and performed at a much slower tempo than the forthcoming Miller adaptation. Shaw broadcast it several times on NBC sustaining broadcasts and the Old Gold “Melody and Madness” program, to a lukewarm audience reception, although Shaw shortened it and speed up the tempo after several performances. He did not record it. When Shaw quit and departed for Mexico in November 1939, Gray joined Glenn Miller. Meanwhile, Wingy Manone went into the RCA studios on April 26, 1939 to record for Bluebird an updated version of “Tar Paper Stomp” titled “Jumpy Nerves.” It is matrix number BS-0036537-1 and was issued as B-10289.

Glenn Miller purchased “In the Mood” from Joe Garland circa June 1939. He tasked arranger Eddie Durham, primarily employed with Count Basie and Jimmie Lunceford, to help work it out with him. The arrangement between Miller and Durham helped Durham financially and Miller immeasurably. During Miller’s breakout year of 1939, Durham contributed many key swing arrangements for the rising band, including “Slip Horn Jive,” “Saint Louis Blues,” “Tiger Rag,” “Glen Island Special,” “I Want to Be Happy,” “Runnin’ Wild” and “Wham (Re-Bop-Boom-Bam).” Durham’s swinging works propelled Miller to popularity over NBC broadcasts from the Meadowbrook Ballroom, Cedar Grove, New Jersey and the Glen Island Casino, New Rochelle, New York. In the end, Miller, Durham and Miller’s pianist and part-time writer J. C. “Chummy” MacGregor ended up editing “In the Mood” as a committee. They trimmed the chart down to a four and a half minute version for broadcast performances and a three-minute version to fit on one side of a 78rpm record.

Miller first broadcast “In the Mood” on a July 26, 1939 sustaining broadcast over NBC’s Blue Network from the Glen Island Casino. This was the complete four and a half minute treatment of the tune. Miller performed it at a faster dancing pace for jitterbugs in keeping with the original tempo of the 1938 Hayes treatment. With added flourishes in the opening and false endings at the close, the tune became an immediate favorite of dancers at the Glen Island Casino and listeners of the radio broadcasts. Miller recorded “In the Mood” on August 1, at the RCA Victor Studio #2, New York. It is matrix number BS-038170-1 and was issued on Bluebird B-10416 and paired with “I Want to be Happy,” recorded at the same session.

“In the Mood” became score 248 in the Miller Library and the Miller Orchestration was published. Between 1939 and when Miller disbanded to join the Army in September 1942, the

band broadcast the tune 62 times on their “Chesterfield Moonlight Serenade” CBS commercial series, “Coca Cola Spotlight Bands” (Mutual and the Blue Network) and NBC and Mutual sustaining broadcasts. Miller took “In the Mood” with him into the service and regularly performed and broadcast it with his Army Air Forces Orchestra in the United States and overseas. “In the Mood” became Miller’s biggest instrumental hit and most-requested number. Per his original RCA contract, Miller received \$175.00 for recording “In the Mood.” Later, the contract was re-negotiated, and Miller received retroactive royalties. In its original release and subsequent re-releases by RCA Victor, “In the Mood” surpassed one million copies of single record sales.

Neither Glenn Miller and his Orchestra or the Glenn Miller Army Air Force Orchestra recorded or broadcast “In the Mood” with Andy Razaf’s lyrics. The band became weary of having to repeatedly perform “In the Mood” for live audiences and on broadcasts, so during 1941 and 1942, Miller updated the tempo and style of the tune and different soloists, such as trumpeter Billy May, introduced new twists to performances. The Army Air Forces treatment was also modified to accommodate the talented soloists drummer Ray McKinley and pianist Mel Powell.

“In the Mood” evolved, as did the content and style of the Miller library. Glenn Miller was not one to stand still. It is an urban legend that he required soloists to perform the solos on “In the Mood” and other arrangements in the same manner every time the tunes were performed. Evidence of Miller’s evolution of “In the Mood” can be found by listening to live performances issued by Sony (BMG, RCA) and independent labels. Issued examples include: “Sunset Serenade” (NBC Blue), November 22, 1941; “Chesterfield Moonlight Serenade” (CBS), December 31, 1941; “I Sustain the Wings” (CBS), July 17, 1943 and “I Sustain the Wings” (NBC), March 4, 1944.

The Four King Sisters backed by a small group from Alvino Rey and his Orchestra identified as the “Rhythm Reys,” recorded a vocal version of “In the Mood” for RCA Bluebird on November 13, 1939 at RCA Studios in Hollywood. It is matrix number PBS-042247-3 and it was issued as Bluebird B-10545 paired with “Irish Washerwoman.” Perhaps because two versions were issued by Bluebird, the RCA Victor label did not issue a cover version of “In the Mood” by another artist. Nor did the other, competing labels release strong competitive versions of the tune.

Following the two 1939 RCA Bluebird releases featuring Miller and the Four King Sisters, the 1938 Decca recording of “In the Mood” by Edgar Hayes was reissued. Al Donahue and his Orchestra waxed “In the Mood” for Vocalion (Columbia) in New York on November 8, 1939 with vocal by future Miller vocalist Paula Kelly. This is matrix number 25533-1, which was released as Vocalion 5238, paired with “Can I Help It,” recorded at the same session. Decca then issued a competing vocal version made by the Merry Macs and recorded November 9, 1939. It is matrix number 66497-A and was issued on Decca 2842, paired with “Shoot the Sherbet to Me Herbert.” Columbia also released an instrumental treatment of “In the Mood” by Teddy Wilson and his Orchestra, recorded January 18, 1940. This is matrix number WCO 26436-A, released as Columbia 35372 and paired with “I’m Crying My Soul Out for You.”

In 1940, there were six versions of “In the Mood” in circulation; two each with RCA, Columbia and Decca. “In the Mood” was also performed on live radio broadcasts by several other name bands, including Benny Goodman and Gene Krupa. The well-known vocal performance of “In the Mood” by the Andrews Sisters was not recorded and released until 1952. Oddly, reissues of this later recording are often mistakenly considered contemporaneous to the Miller recording or the time period of the Second World War. But none of the other competitive or subsequent versions had the success or appeal of Miller’s popular and immediately recognizable record, which has earned immortality as the unofficial anthem of the swing era.

While serving as major in the Army Air Forces and directing his legendary AAF concert

orchestra, Glenn Miller disappeared on a routine plane flight from England to France on December 15, 1944. No trace of the airplane or Miller has ever been found, and he remains missing in action to this day. “In the Mood” has lived and thrived long after Miller’s lifetime, performed by many professional and school bands, and featured by the current Glenn Miller Orchestra directed by Nick Hilscher.

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\*The views expressed in this essay are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of the Library of Congress.

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