

THE SLATKIN FAMILY COLLECTION

(Summary)



M/Sgt. Felix Slatkin (second from left) and AAF "fiddlers" Bronislaw Caper, Marshall Sosson and Ruggerio Ricci

Felix and Eleanor Ailler Slatkin

With the generosity Frederic Zlotkin and Leonard Slatkin, the sons of Felix Slatkin and Eleanor Aller Slatkin, we are pleased to announce the creation of the Glenn Miller Archive Felix and Eleanor Aller Slatkin Collection, honoring the two legendary American musical virtuosi. This initiative has been coming together for some time and due in no small way to the dedication of mutual friend Bill Freytag. Our university family is understandably very honored and enriched to be entrusted with the preservation of the esteemed Slatkin legacy. Ultimately the body of public and private recordings and rare transcription discs of performances by Felix and Eleanor will be preserved at the Glenn Miller Archive for scholars, students and the public along with their important documents and papers.

This initiative has already born fruit with the discovery of Army Air Forces radio recordings directed by M/Sgt. Felix Slatkin that offer us a rare glimpse into the activities of the First Army Air Forces Radio Production Unit and 38th AAF Band, and later, the Second Army Air Forces Radio Production Unit and 29th AAF Band. We will be working closely with Fred Zlotkin and Bill Freytag as we move forward to ascertain and catalog more recordings that encompass the entire careers of Felix and Eleanor. Given the nature of his wartime assignment, it is natural to permanently honor M/Sgt. Slatkin alongside his colleague Capt. Alton Glenn Miller and preserve their legacies together. We came to our agreement to move forward and received the first batch of 16-inch Army Air Forces discs and other recordings in October 2013. As we get our arms around the Slatkin legacy, we will have more to share about the richness of the music and talent that is evident on the many recordings and broadcasts.

About Felix Slatkin and Eleanor Aller Slatkin

Felix Slatkin (1915-1963) was a renowned arranger, conductor and violin virtuoso. He was born December 22, 1915 in St. Louis, Missouri. He began studying the violin at the age of nine with Isadore Grossman and at age ten won a scholarship to the Curtis Institute when he studied violin with Efrem Zimbalist and conducting with Fritz Reiner. At 17 he joined the St. Louis Symphony and formed a chamber orchestra of young musicians and in 1935 won a competition, which included a solo appearance at the Hollywood Bowl. Around this time he met acclaimed cellist Eleanor Aller, whom he later married.

During the Second World War, M/Sgt. Felix Slatkin served in the Army Air Forces. Under the command of Lt. Col. Eddie Dunstedter, M/Sgt. Slatkin as Musical Director conducted the First Army Air Forces Radio Unit Orchestra, later the 38th AAF Band, stationed at Santa Ana Army Air Base. The Slatkin AAF Orchestra broadcast several national network radio programs originating from Hollywood aimed at recruiting young people to join the AAF and to communicate the aims of the AAF to the American public, including "Hello Mom", "Soldiers With Wings", "Wings Over the Nation", "Wings to Victory", "Wings Over the World" and "Roosty of the AAF". The orchestra also appeared on many Armed Forces Radio Service programs recorded for broadcast to the armed forces overseas and the Office of War Information, including "Uncle Sam Presents" and "Music with Wings". This orchestra was the west coast equivalent of the Second Army Air Forces Radio Unit Orchestra, later the 39th AAF Band, directed by Capt. Glenn Miller, stationed at the AAF Technical School, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut. The Commanding General of the Army Air Forces, Gen. H. H. "Hap" Arnold, understood the importance of an AAF national radio presence located with the radio networks in Hollywood and New York. The radio units were complete entertainment groups including musicians, actors and producers. The west coast radio unit also appeared in AAF training films and short subjects made by Warner Brothers Studios in Burbank and the First AAF Motion Picture Unit in Culver City. Whereas the East Coast group included professionals such as Miller, announcer Lt. Don Briggs, singer Sgt. Johnny Desmond and actors such as Cpl. Broderick Crawford, the West Coast group included professionals such as Slatkin, announcer Sgt. Hal Gibney, singer Cpl. Bob Houston and actors such as Pvt. Lee J. Cobb. When Capt. Miller's organization was sent to Europe, the AAF Orchestra from Fort Worth, Texas, conducted by M/Sgt. Harry Bluestone was transferred to New York to replace Miller. In early 1945, Slatkin and Bluestone switched assignments and M/Sgt. Slatkin conducted the New York unit until the end of the war. The radio programs conducted by M/Sgt. Slatkin from the east coast included "I Sustain the Wings", "The Fighting AAF", "Your AAF", "Wings For Tomorrow", "First in the Air" and "Symphonic Flight".

Felix Slatkin returned to Los Angeles after the war and accepted the position of Concertmaster of the 20th Century Fox Studio Orchestra. He was Frank Sinatra's concertmaster and conductor of choice at Capitol Records in the 1950s. A virtuoso performer in his own right (and recorded as a classical violinist), Felix also founded the Concert Arts Orchestra and made innumerable appearances with the Hollywood Bowl Symphony Orchestra.

Eleanor Aller Slatkin was a renowned studio cellist for whom John Williams wrote a prominent part in the score of "Close Encounters of the Third Kind." Born in New York City, Eleanor was the daughter of cellist Gregory Aller (Grisha Altshuler). She became principal cellist for the Warner Brothers Studio Orchestra in 1939. Her brother, pianist Victor Aller, was the manager of the orchestra, in which their father also played for a time. Eleanor's performances can be heard on many classic Warner Brothers films.

Felix and Eleanor founded the legendary American classical group, Hollywood String Quartet. They were active from 1945 through 1962 and made numerous recordings for Capitol records (one won a Grammy) The Hollywood String Quartet (HSQ) was a superior group comprising four of the most reliable session musicians in Hollywood: Felix (violin), Paul C. Shure (violin), Alvin Dinkin (viola) and Eleanor (cello). All were Hollywood film studio players, who fulfilled their passion for classical repertory by playing together in their off time. "In 1939, I became the first cellist at Warner Brothers," recalled Eleanor Slatkin. "Felix and I married, then formed the Quartet. The original group was Felix, Joachim Chassman, Paul Robyn, and me. Then Felix went into the army in 1941, and there went the Quartet! When he came out of the service in 1945, Felix continued as concertmaster at Twentieth Century Fox, and we started the Quartet again."

The 1945 group replaced Chassman with Paul C. Shure (at that time assistant concertmaster at Fox). During the next nine years, the group gained widespread recognition. "We were the most famous American quartet - the first ever, in fact, to be invited to the Edinburgh Festival," Shure recalled. "We went at it 'hammer and tongs,' and rehearsed almost every day, creating a fine quartet that became world famous more on the strength of its recordings than anything else." The original vinyl pressings of their LPs are highly prized collectibles today.

"The advantage of being a studio musician was that you were under contract, and like a symphony orchestra musician, you worked approximately twenty-two to twenty-four hours a week, and had a great deal of free time to pursue other interests. Hence, my parents were able to not only have a decent living by working in the studios, but it provided them with a means to establish one of the great quartets of our time," explains Leonard Slatkin.

Following the death of Felix in 1963, Eleanor continued to play in orchestras for recordings made by Frank Sinatra.

About the sons of Felix Slatkin and Eleanor Aller Slatkin

Leonard Slatkin is Music Director of the Detroit Symphony Orchestra, conductor Laureate of the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra and Music Director of the National Symphony Orchestra.

Frederick Zlotkin (who uses the original Russian spelling of the family name) is Substitute Cellist for the New York Philharmonic, Principal Cellist for the New York City ballet and Cellist for the Lyric Piano Quartet.