

RADIO RECORDINGS



"Uncle Sam Presents" March 25, 1944 (NBC Disc)
AAFTC Orchestra Directed by Capt. Glenn Miller

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Preserving Broadcasting and Musical History

Many individuals and organizations have possession of the surviving recordings of radio programs. There were several methods by which radio programs circa 1935-1950 containing musical content were recorded and preserved. Following is a general summary of the types of recordings that were made and how many of them survive at the Glenn Miller Archive and elsewhere.

1. Radio Networks

The national radio networks in the United States as of 1941 consisted of the National Broadcasting Company (NBC) with its Red and Blue Networks, the Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS) and the Mutual Broadcasting System (Mutual). In addition, several regional networks existed with member stations that were also affiliated with the national services. Mutual was a cooperative effort led by several large local station owners in Chicago (WGN), Los Angeles (KHJ) and New York (WOR). NBC also operated an International Division or its White Network, which broadcast shortwave signals overseas from transmitters on both coasts operated by the General Electric Company.

NBC and CBS each owned the federally regulated maximum of local stations, including: NBC Red – WAAF, New York; WMAQ, Chicago and KPO, San Francisco; NBC Blue – WJZ New York; WENR, Chicago and KGO, San Francisco. NBC did not own stations at this time in Los Angeles. Its powerful Southern California affiliate was the Earle C. Anthony Company, owner of KFI (Red) and KECA (Blue). CBS-owned stations included WABC, New York, WBBM, Chicago and KNX, Los Angeles. In 1941 the Federal Communications Commission ordered NBC to sell one of its networks. As of January 1, 1942, its Blue Network ceased to identify itself as part of NBC although its facilities continued to be operated by NBC. In 1945, Edward J. Noble completed the purchase of the Blue Network and renamed it the American Broadcasting Company (ABC).

The radio networks recorded many of their programs for three basic reasons; compliance, time zones and legal protection.

Compliance was required by advertisers to verify that advertisements ran at the proper time and position. The networks were required therefore to hold very large libraries of discs until the advent of tape. Although NBC in particular maintained for many years a policy of favoring live performances over recorded performances, by 1942 both NBC and CBS were becoming pressured by costs to consider recording programs for broadcast in western time zones. For example, during 1942 Glenn Miller's "Chesterfield Moonlight Serenade" was broadcast twice, at 7:15 p.m. (Eastern) and 11:15 p.m. (Eastern). The earlier feed served the Eastern and Central time zones and the latter feed served the Mountain and Pacific Time zones. While recordings of particularly musical programs were discouraged, NBC nonetheless had to record programs at one of their strategically located owned-and-operated stations, KOA, Denver, for later feeds to western states. An entertainer with the stature of Bing Crosby would forever change the policy of the networks by insisting that his "Kraft Music Hall" programs be recorded for broadcast by NBC rather than being broadcast live. When the network and sponsor refused, Crosby took himself and his team to ABC and a new sponsor, Philco, who gladly allowed him to record his program rather than having it broadcast live. Crosby was an early and serious investor in the Ampex Corporation of Redwood City, California. Ampex held rights to German magnetic tape recording technology that had been seized by the United States Army in 1945. Eventually and with the use of magnetic tape, almost all network musical programs would come to be taped for radio as well as television.

The network legal departments also required that programs be recorded to protect the networks with recorded evidence in the event anyone sued them or made claims that they aired improper content. The National Association of Broadcasters enforced certain codes of content and language. The Federal Communications Commission licensed broadcasters and licenses were periodically up for renewal and could be contested by competing applicants or held up by complaints from the public or interest groups. For legal purposes, CBS owned station WBBM in Chicago used a recording device with 16-inch white plastic constant groove low speed discs that could hold several hours of programming on a single side.

Compliance, time zone and legal evidence recordings meant that NBC and CBS maintained large libraries of recordings. They recorded and saved "air checks" for many of their sustaining broadcasts, most of which aired at night and involved popular music and all the big bands.

Network recordings were made in 78-rpm, 10-inch and 12-inch disc formats, and the more common 33-rpm 16-inch disc format. Their 16-inch discs generally contained fifteen minutes of program time. Hence, two disc sides were used for a 30-minute broadcast and four disc sides were used for a 60-minute broadcast. These recordings were closely held by the radio networks and were the property of the networks.

Over time, the network libraries were donated to archives such as the NBC Collection at the Library of Congress, given away or destroyed. Portions including the popular music recordings of NBC were retained by parent RCA for potential use in future RCA Victor record releases. Many broadcasts were “liberated” from RCA and other rights holder over time by collectors and opportunists and circulated via “bootleg” commercial record releases, “offshore” record releases and privately among individuals or “clubs”.

The Glenn Miller sustaining broadcasts from NBC Red and Blue that survive from the 1938-1941 time period were or are located in the RCA recordings vault that passed in ownership first to BMG and now Sony Corporation.

The networks aired “commercial” programs, broadcasts that were sponsored (paid for) by advertisers; and “sustaining” programs, broadcasts that were not sponsored and aired without advertising.

Sustaining broadcasts from ballrooms, hotels and restaurants were generally paid for by the networks. The venues received major publicity from the broadcasts. Time slots were most coveted by the ballroom operators and the hoteliers. Many paid for permanent transmission facilities and equipment at their locations. Many commercial programs (see below) were broadcast from these venues as well as movie theatres. The theaters catered to audiences with live stage shows to augment their motion picture exhibitions.

The major New York-area broadcast locations included the Café Rouge of the Hotel Pennsylvania, Hotel Astor Roof Garden, Hotel New Yorker, Meadowbrook Ballroom, Cedar Grove, New Jersey and of course the Glen Island Casino, New Rochelle; the Palladium Ballroom-Café and Casino Gardens were among the major Los Angeles-area broadcast locations; and Chicago-area venues receiving ample amounts of broadcast exposure included the Blackhawk Restaurant and the Panther Room of the College Inn, Hotel Sherman. Every city in the nation had venues from which local, regional and national broadcasts were made, including the Mural Room of the Hotel St. Francis, San Francisco; Eastwood Gardens, Detroit and Elitch Gardens, Denver.

Many ballroom owners such as Frank Dailey of the Meadowbrook in New Jersey became financially involved in broadcasts from their sites and expected to have ownership of the broadcast recordings, which the networks refused.



"I Sustain the Wings", August 5, 1944 (NBC Disc)
AAFTC Orchestra directed by M/Sgt. Harry Bluestone

Commercial and sustaining programs including musical content were retained in the network libraries, as were news and all other types of programs. During the war years, network programs containing armed forces personnel or services oriented themes were kept in the network files. Discs containing "I Sustain the Wings" broadcasts made by The Army Air Forces Training Command Orchestra" at NBC Saturdays at 6:00 p.m. and 11:30 p.m. (Eastern time) were saved in the NBC library. Discs containing Office of War Information (OWI) "Uncle Sam Presents" and "Music From America" programs recorded at NBC by the AAFTC Orchestra were also saved in the NBC library.

In subsequent years, discs in the NBC library saved at RCA and containing programs by Glenn Miller and his Orchestra and the Army Air Forces Training Command Orchestra directed by Captain Glenn Miller were transferred to magnetic tape. Portions of these tapes have been used in the production of RCA Victor records, BMG and Sony compact disc releases from 1954 to date. The RCA vault has also held material by literally every other musician and vocalist who appeared over the NBC networks. Many discs and tapes reside elsewhere including materials that are held in safe keeping among the Glenn Miller Archive Collections or in the possession of trusted associates. One purpose of the Glenn Miller Archive is to retrieve, restore and preserve materials that were removed from formal possession by RCA in past decades.



NBC Reference Recording, AAFTC Orchestra directed by Capt. Glenn Miller
"I Sustain the Wings" May 6, 1944
"Stealin' Apples" excerpt, misidentified in handwriting as Benny Goodman

2. Radio Stations

Mutual network affiliates rather than the cooperative network itself tended to record and save much of their programs, including both news and entertainment. WGN, Chicago and WOR, New York retained many broadcasts. Large regional stations with major investments in musical performances, such as WLW, Cincinnati (affiliated with NBC and Mutual); WSB, Atlanta (also affiliated with NBC and Mutual) and many others kept substantial recording libraries. Many stations recorded network programs for later broadcast. Others contracted with the networks and advertisers to feed programs regionally after their initial broadcast. For example, Glenn Miller's "Chesterfield Moonlight Serenade" was recorded by WOR, New York during 1940 and 1941, by agreement with CBS and the sponsor Liggett and Meyers Tobacco Company. The reason was that per a prior agreement, CBS affiliates in New England could not carry the Miller broadcast live at its then 10:00 p.m. (Eastern) time. WOR's recordings were broadcast on a delayed basis to the Mutual stations in these specific markets.

Many local station recordings of musical programs survived over the years and their many colorful and unique record labels are very interesting to see. Most of the station discs suffered the fate of many network discs in eventually being destroyed. Many collectors have stories of being given discs by stations before they threw them out. Several Glenn Miller Archive Collections contain a rich amount of content that was saved when individuals rescued the programs before their destruction.

Numerous independent recording companies contracted with the radio stations to furnish record materials that the stations would use to make their own records. The Glenn Miller Archive holds recordings made from these materials by local stations of network broadcasts by numerous artists including Glenn Miller. So the local stations in addition to the networks were a source of musical recordings. In both cases, the composers, performers, and/or their legal heirs hold intellectual property copyright.



Radio Recorders, 1953 Disc

3. Recording Companies

The independent recording companies included World Recording Service, C. P. MacGregor, Harry Smith, Universal (Raymond Scott), Radio Recorders and many other national and local recording services. The main services not only provided recording materials for stations, they also served advertising agencies, advertisers, entertainers, producers and other professionals, as well as private individuals, who required recording services. Their services extended to maintaining recording studios that had direct, high quality lines into the radio network facilities in New York, Chicago and Los Angeles. Their clients contracted with them to record programs of interest, usually where the client had a financial interest in the program, but not necessarily.



NBC International Disc (Latin America)

4. Syndicated Services

Some recording companies also had their own studios where entertainers could record “syndicated” packages of recordings that local station hosts could play on the air. The World library is well known and many of these discs survive. Independent record and compact disc producers have used World transcriptions for their latter-day releases of music by many artists.

NBC was a major syndicator with their “Thesaurus”, “Standard” and other series of recordings. Local broadcasters needed content and the syndicators provided it. There could be only one affiliate of each national network in any market so there were many more radio stations that needed and licensed syndicated transcriptions. The discs and tapes of discs that survive are also governed by copyright in terms of composer and artist rights.



Standard Program Library Disc - Z-170

5. Advertisers

During the heyday of network radio, Advertisers and their advertising agencies controlled and owned the commercial network programs. They contracted with the networks and syndicated services to record their programs. The entertainers, writers and other staff employed for most programs were under contract to the sponsors and agencies. For example, Benny Goodman and Xavier Cugat had contracts with R. J. Reynolds Company for their “Camel Caravan” and “Camel Rumba Revue” programs; Kay Kyser with the American Tobacco Company for his “Lucky Strike Kollege of Musical Knowledge, Tommy Dorsey with Brown and Williamson Tobacco Company for his “Raleigh-Kool” program, Glenn Miller with Liggett and Myers Tobacco Company for his “Chesterfield Moonlight Serenade” program and Harry James for “Chesterfield Time” which succeeded Miller’s program in September 1942.

Also among the Liggett and Myers “Chesterfield” talent pool were Fred Waring, Johnny Mercer and Perry Como. Artie Shaw and Woody Herman were under contract with the P. Lorillard Company for “Old Gold”.

Not all were certainly tobacco companies. Kraft Foods sponsored Bing Crosby and the Kraft Music Hall; Coca-Cola sponsored Andre Kostelanetz and his “Pleasure Time” program; Morton Downey, and the famous “Spotlight Bands”, which featured many bands. Dozens of other advertisers sponsored musical programs.

The sponsor’s advertising agencies such as Young and Rubicam, J. Walter Thompson, McCann-Erickson, Newell-Emmett and others controlled talent, scripts and all aspects of radio programming.



"Glenn Miller's Moonlight Serenade" No. 17 (1952)

6. Entertainers

Entertainers had reason to have the recording companies make private copies of their broadcasts for them. Bandleaders could go back and listen to their performances and make necessary changes. Glenn Miller contracted with the Harry Smith recording service, which had a direct line to CBS in New York. The “Chesterfield Moonlight Serenade” programs were recorded and kept at Glenn Miller’s business office. The Harry Smith discs are 12-inch 78 rpm, because that is what Glenn could play at home. After Miller’s disappearance, his private discs were used first for a Glenn Miller Estate sponsored syndicated radio series “Glenn Miller’s Moonlight Serenade” in the early 1950s. Next, they were copied to tape by RCA and used along with Miller’s NBC materials for RCA Victor record releases. RCA made several tape copies of the programs. As with the NBC discs and tapes, copies of some programs have gotten out and have been circulated in an unauthorized manner among private collectors and in a few “bootleg” commercial releases. Some of these now appear on Internet sites, generally without authorization or license from the Miller family or Sony. Glenn Miller’s private discs were returned from RCA to the Miller Estate after they were copied to tape. The discs remain the property of the Miller family. Among the other notable entertainers who had their performances privately recorded were Bing Crosby and Benny Goodman. Most private recordings were inherited by the entertainers’ heirs and have not been generally released in authorized form although certain families have encouraged some releases and many have certainly assisted with preservation by formal archives at universities such as the Glenn Miller Archive.



1941 Home Recording Disc of Glenn Miller's "Chesterfield Moonlight Serenade"

7. Individuals

Home recording devices became very popular among music lovers and technicians by 1940. Several collectors became very prolific at recording big bands off-air from their local stations using home recording devices. Companies such as Presto had good businesses selling blank discs. The quality of the materials generally nowhere near what the professionals had, but there were notable exceptions of individuals who had the expertise and ability to carefully invest in top-rate equipment. Savvy collectors made many recordings that have survived and forming the backbone of private collector circulation and independent or “bootleg” commercial releases. When you hear a local station identification following a network broadcast on a scratchy recording, you may be listening to what was a home recording more often than not (or a local station recording). In the 1930s William Savory in New York made a considerable number of recordings that made news in recent years when a museum in New York announced that it held many of the Savory home recordings of major artists including Duke Ellington, Count Basie and Benny Goodman. Numerous collectors are familiar with the 1940-1942 home recordings of John Paul Jones of Pennsylvania, which were widely circulated in past decades. There are many other home recordings that have passed among collectors.

In the United Kingdom, the legendary Carlo Krahmer and Peter Newbrook made many home recordings including broadcasts over AEF and BBC by The American Band of the AEF directed by Major Glenn Miller and its sub-units. Their surviving recordings form the backbone of what survives from the ABAEF in England and on the Continent. As an aside, Peter Newbrook was a famous cinematographer (“Bridge on the River Kwai”, etc.). With shortages experienced during the war years, most of the American big band home recordings were made before 1942 or after 1945.



"Yank Bandstand", AFRS, March 1945

8. Armed Forces and Government

Beginning in 1942, the Bureau of Public Relations (BPR) and Special Services Division (SSD) of the United States Army began to produce and record their own radio programs intended for distribution to the armed forces via OWI shortwave stations and the initially small group of military radio stations. In addition, the BPR and SSD asked for and received "carte-blanche" approval from the radio networks, sponsors and the musician's union to copy commercial and sustaining network programs for distribution to the armed forces. In addition to shortwave and repeater station broadcasts, the fledgling military broadcasting service determined that it would need to manufacture transcription discs to circulate programming to the American forces stationed around the world. Prior to the establishment of the Armed Forces Radio Service in October 1943, commanding officer Col. Thomas H. A. Lewis developed a sophisticated system of program editing to remove commercials and the recording of both "off-network" and original programs for the forces personnel and their allies. Many thousands of 12-inch and 16-inch discs were packaged and shipped daily to points all around the world. The AFRS became literally the world's largest broadcaster in short order. AFRS discs found their way to hundreds of AFRS stations, mobile field stations and their affiliates (for more information, please see the separate Glenn Miller Archive report "Armed Forces Radio Service" which is available at the GMA website). Among the destinations for AFRS transcription discs of off-network and original programs were the AFN and the AEFB based in London.

Thousands of AFRS discs survive and many are in outstanding condition because of the materials and techniques that were used in their manufacture. As with the Army, Navy and Marine Corps "V-Discs", there was no intention or foresight about what would become of these items intended for military use many decades later. It was presumed by the musician's union among others that the recordings would be destroyed. Some masters were; some were retained by AFRS for future use. Many more discs simply remained at their destinations or saved by military personnel for personal use. What ended up happening is that these discs form a treasure trove of many thousands of hours of musical content; from off-network sources such as "Spotlight Bands" (Coca-Cola source material featuring many bands), "One Night Stand" (syndicated source material featuring many bands), "Tommy Dorsey Show" ("Raleigh-Kool" source material), "Harry James Show" ("Chesterfield Time" source material), "Music Hall" (Bing Crosby "Kraft Music Hall" source material) and many dozens more; original programs such as "Command Performance", "Jubilee", "G. I. Journal", "G. I. Jive", "Downbeat" and "Mail Call" among many others.

Due to the recording industry ban by the musician's union from August 1942 to November 1944, the AFRS discs contain our best and sometimes only source of recorded material for many bands during that period.

The AFRS programs have been widely circulated over the years both privately and in authorized and unauthorized commercial releases. Their legal and ownership status is not as clear-cut as the network and private recordings because of their original purpose and conditions. Current producers are safe to extend the same composer and entertainer "mechanical" fee considerations for these performances when attempting to use them for public performance. That said, hundreds of AFRS items have appeared in record and compact disc releases and dozens are posted at Internet sites either for a fee or for free.

In addition to the Armed Forces, the Office of War Information (OWI) also copied, recorded, circulated and broadcast recordings from radio performances and studio recording sessions. The OWI was employed by the Armed Forces to broadcast this content to United Nations forces around the world because the Special Services and later AFRS transmitter sites could not reach all of the forces. The primary mission of the OWI was to operate its "Voice of America" foreign broadcasting service. The OWI VOA service broadcast in dozens of languages across the globe, with primary operations in Europe, and located in London. The European Service was known as the American Broadcasting Station in Europe (ABSIE). Many of the OWI programs were recorded in the United States by NBC. Prior to the creation of the "Voice of America" service and throughout the Second World War, the shortwave transmitters and studio facilities which broadcast the OWI programs were the pre-war NBC International Division (White Network) production facilities, General Electric and RCA transmitter sites on the Atlantic and Pacific Coasts.

In theory, the armed forces and government recordings were the property of the United States of America and were not to be available for domestic public performance. In reality, many have been readily available to the public for many decades without sanction.

The Glenn Miller Archive preserves thousands of AFRS recordings in disc and tape form. We have restored many in modern digital form and continue to gather as many as possible for preservation.



Office of War Information (OWI) Disc, "Mission to Moscow"
AAFTC Orchestra directed by Capt. Glenn Miller

Summary

This overview is not intended to be a complete and detailed examination of radio recordings but rather a general summary of what recordings were made, the circumstances of their history and the current status of the surviving materials.

This report was prepared with the assistance of Edward F. Polic.