



The Patriot-News

Glenn Miller Orchestra swings into town

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I asked my mom the songs she heard, the night the Glenn Miller Orchestra appeared in Wilkes-Barre.

"String of Pearls," she said. "Chattanooga Choo-Choo.' Oh my gosh. It goes on and on. 'American Patrol.'"

I know all those songs, too, from listening to Mom's Glenn Miller records when I was growing up. Didn't all kids my age listen to Bill Joel one minute and Glenn Miller the next?

Sadly, Mom didn't see Glenn Miller himself. He and his plane had disappeared over the English Channel in December 1944. This was just after the war, when people had money for the \$10 ticket, and the band was swinging under Miller's first successor, singer Tex Beneke.

You wonder how an institution can last six decades without its guiding light, but then the answer hits you like a Harry James trumpet blast -- it's the music, stupid.

At 7 p.m. Monday, the Glenn Miller Orchestra, under the direction of Larry O'Brien, takes the stage at Central Dauphin High School. Its warm-up act? The Central Dauphin Jazz Ensemble, of course. If I weren't busy that night (insert frownie face here), I could take my mom for the amazing student/senior citizen ticket price of \$9 -- one dollar less than Mom paid in 1946! The rest of us pay a whopping \$12. Not a fundraiser, clearly.

"We try to do this much more for the experience for the student musicians and for the public to have an opportunity to see the band," CD band director Matthew Ceresini said. "They were in Lancaster for \$25. We want people to be able to come. We want it to be a sold-out performance."

The 1,000-seat auditorium sold out in 2008, the first time the Glenn Miller Orchestra came to Central Dauphin. No big deal for the pros. Big deal for the students.

"It's probably the biggest house they'll play for," Ceresini said. Plus, students get a close encounter with professional musicians. "They get an idea of the level of commitment and excellence needed if they want to make this a career."

When he took the CD job five years ago, Ceresini inherited a thriving music program, including three jazz ensembles, built by his predecessor, Jim Milbrand.

Students learn to love Glenn Miller and Duke Ellington and Latin jazz and modern jazz because they hear it and play it.

"Kids get the opportunity to discover music and the arts on a deeper level, which I think helps students enjoy school more," Ceresini said. He's also quick to credit the band boosters who support the students -- even organizing events that don't raise big bucks.

"It's an amazing group of committed parents who make my job so much easier," he said. "They've been instrumental in making this happen."

The only sad part about the Glenn Miller concert -- other than my missing it -- is that it's in an auditorium, not a hotel ballroom such as the one where Mom saw the Glenn Miller Orchestra so many decades ago. I picture the musicians in white jackets and black bow ties. Patrons sway gently to "Moonlight Serenade," but suddenly, the opening notes of "In the Mood" raise the roof.

Mom remembers. "We'd get out there and dance, and dance, and dance ..."

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